

**HOWARD KIMELDORF INTERVIEWS FOR *REDS OR RACKETS?***

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**BILL BAILEY OF ILWU LOCAL 10, COMMUNIST PARTY**

**INTERVIEWEE:** BILL BAILEY

**INTERVIEWERS:** HOWARD KIMELDORF

**SUBJECTS:** LOCAL 10; COMMUNIST PARTY; MARINE FIREMEN'S UNION; HAWAI'I; WORLD WAR II; CLASS COLLABORATION; MARINE WORKERS INDUSTRIAL UNION; NEW YORK CITY; SAN FRANCISCO; WOBBLIES; TRADE UNION UNITY LEAGUE; SS *BREMEN* INCIDENT; SOVIET UNION; INTERNATIONAL UNION OF SEAMEN AND HARBOR WORKERS; 1934 STRIKE; 1936-1937 STRIKE; JOB-SELLING; CRIMINAL SYNDICALISM

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[00:00:00] **HOWARD KIMELDORF:** So, Bill, why don't you start by just telling me your involvement, how you got into the maritime industry.

[00:00:11] **BILL BAILEY:** Well, I started out going to sea when I was about 15 years old, 14 and a half, 15 years old, and that was back in '28, '29. I remember getting on a ship in New York, as an ordinary seaman working for \$30-35 dollars/month. From then I just went on other ships; I pursued it, kept on going with it. I spent some 23 years on the sea before I involuntarily gave it up. Because I got screened off the waterfront. I was a sea-going guy, although during the war I said I was an engineer, all during the war, no problems there. But it was just during the Korean War, when they came up, that they passed the screening bill. The right-wing unions

had a hay day; they got rid of all the left-wingers they wanted. All they did was hand us over to the Coast Guard. Coast Guard said, “We’ll take care of it from there.” That’s what happened.

[00:01:13] **HOWARD:** Why did you go to sea? Wasn't that awfully young?

[00:01:15] **BILL:** I come from a family of dire poverty. It would have been just as well had I got into any industry that had a kitchen in it where they fed you. You know, I was growing—that’s what I needed, someplace where there was [sic] meals there waiting for you. I remember trying to do part of the [inaudible] \_\_\_\_\_, that area. I even tried to join the marines. Everything was for hunger. It was a sad set-up.

But I do remember trying to join the Marines. It looked like I was going to make it. The doctor put me up on the desk, and he says—no, that was the Navy guy. The Marines guy said, “Take a walk. Walk over to that corner there. Oh, no, you’re flat-footed. We can’t take you.” That was just like that. I went down. So, I says ok, son of a bitch, I’m going to make it somewhere, so I went to join the Navy. Or, try to join the Navy. Everything was working fine. Heart, lung, eyesight, hearing; everything was perfect. The doctor says, “Hey, I don’t like the way you’re walking there. Something’s wrong there. Walk some more.” I walked. He said, “You must have had polio when you were a kid.” I said, “Yeah. It left one leg half an inch shorter than the other.” He says, “I’m sorry, but we can’t take you.” God! I was so disappointed, you know? It was two o’clock, and I knew that, if they would have accepted me then, they would have sent me to a camp someplace. I would have had my supper waiting for me. Hunger and food was a reality. I had no money floating around, no jobs. Jobs were impossible to get.

Be as it may, in a sense I’m glad that I didn’t get into either one of the outfits. I’m glad now that I didn’t even go to the army. The army was the last resort. The hell with the Coast Guard. In them days, they wasn’t [sic] taking anybody in. They shut the door and said, ‘that’s it, no recruits, we don’t want ‘em. We’re overloaded.’ You know, people trying to get in to get a meal, more or less, or some security.

[00:03:22] **HOWARD:** Were you old enough to join the service?

[00:03:24] **BILL:** Hell, no, I was doing all sorts of ages. Pulling out brothers’ birth certificates, lying like a son of a bitch. I’d tell them I was 21; I was only 15. But that’s the name of the game. It didn’t make any difference to me. As far as I was concerned, I wasn’t doing anything unscrupulous. I was just trying to preserve myself.

[00:03:43] **HOWARD:** So you shipped out of New York—

[00:03:44] **BILL:** Yeah, I walked down until I could get a ship. I covered every single ship in the New York harbor including foreign ships. I went aboard English ships hunting to try to get a job. Ships like the [SS] Minnetonka, the [SS] Minnewaska sailing into London or something like that. The engineer would say, “But you’re a Yank! We can’t take you. If you was [sic] over there, maybe we could take you. If you was [sic] in London we could probably grab you. We can’t take you. We got all kinds of cousins on the dock there trying to get a job. Guys who had jumped ship or been in the hospital here, stuff like that. Trying to get home, back to England. No, we can’t do it. We have to take care of our own people first.” That’s when I started hearing “my own people first,” which you didn’t hear too well in them days. ‘Course now you’re hearing it more in this period. “Take care of our people first.” “Our people,” who the hell are “our people”?

But, anyhow, I couldn’t just say, “Hey, man, I’m starving to death. Just give me a job.” Be as it may, I didn’t get nothing, and I ended up on the last ship on the waterfront in New York harbor. Pier 1, way the hell down the Battery. You familiar with New York?

[00:05:00] **HOWARD:** A little there.

[00:05:01] **BILL:** Well, Pier 1 used to be an excursive pier where the overnight boats used to go up to Albany [New York] . It was also the outfit called the New-Tex Line, oh, way back. They ran little steamers, freighters down to Texas. General cargo down there into Houston [Texas] and Galveston [Texas] . Then went over to the sulfur ports, [?Shreveport?] [Louisiana] and Sulfur City [Louisiana] , Texas City [Texas] places like that. Load up with bulk sulfur, and took that all the way up to Baltimore [Maryland] . Then came down from Baltimore to New York [New York] , cleaned the hold out, and loaded up with general cargo again.

So, I just happened to go aboard the ship, I guess the mate had an argument with an ordinary seaman. I don't know what the beef was, but he fired him. I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. I stood there lying like hell. Told them I was an experienced seaman; I'd been on all Seven Seas, including the Dead Sea, I could do anything on his ship, blah blah, I'm 21 years old, and I've already been on so many ships, this and that. And I started naming them, including Belgian ships, English ships, and everything. The guy just said, "Yeah, ok, come on back at five o'clock and six o'clock take over the gangway watching." From then on, I had a job as an ordinary seaman.

The whole myth of going to sea, the whole mentality you had built up in the mind—going to sea would solve all your problems—it just didn't. Because it only solved them momentarily while you was [sic] aboard the ship. After you stepped ashore, the problems were still there. Housing, hunger, family disputes, the hell of life. They were all taking place all over again. As long as I was on the ship, I had my three meals a day and a certain amount of security. But once I got off the ship, back to the old problems again. It's like, before you got on, you have a beef with the wife. You figure, ok, I'm shipping out now tomorrow and it will be all squared away. So when you come back, it'll be a new honeymoon. But you didn't solve the problem. You only intensified them. Well, you had a honeymoon for a couple of days. Bang, out would come the problems again, whatever they were. So it was a question of you trying to solve these things. If you don't solve them, you're screwed. You know, it's a pretty sad ending.

[00:07:17] **HOWARD:** Was it a union ship that you were on?

[00:07:20] **BILL:** No, in them days we didn't have a union. That's why you went with your cap in your hand, bumming a job to the engineer, or the mate, or the steward. "I could work harder than the next guy. I could do a better job. I'm more experienced." You didn't say you'd work for less money, but you'd say, "Hey man, I can take anything you've got to hand me." And put up a front for the interview. You're strong and healthy. Of course, they're going to take your young muscles and no brains over some guy who's 70 years old, no matter how much experience he has, because he couldn't handle the load, and so on.

But after you make your first trip, you learn an awful lot. I used to believe that, as soon as the ship got at sea at night time, they'd put out all the lights and drop the anchor. I mean, ships never sailed at night! How can they see? You'd have to be crazy! They only sail during the day.

[00:08:21] **HOWARD:** How did you adjust on that first trip, being—

[00:08:24] **BILL:** I was pretty seasick right off the bat. Everything went wrong. I remember being up on the forecastle head [also: fo'c'sle] watch. He said to me, "You get up the forecastle head, spot the lights." Well, if the weather is calm, and you're up on the forecastle head spotting lights—are you familiar with the set up?

[00:08:43] **HOWARD:** A little bit.

[00:08:44] **BILL:** Well, you see a light to port, way off on the horizon, and, bang, you got to the bell, bong! One bell. The mate will holler after he spots the light himself. The bell is to draw his attention to it, and you're

telling him, bang, one bell, across to port. He looks out to port, “Ok!” Now, then, if you see a light off to starboard, bang bang! Two bells. He’ll come out and look. Or a light straight ahead, three bells. But you’re supposed to at least report them to draw his attention to it.

It was freezing leaving New York harbor that time. It was cold, and I was unfamiliar with it. It started to sway up and down. The winches, there was also the anchor winch, a combination anchor winch and holds the line, drawing in all the ropes that you tied up the ship with. Pulling it all aboard, and you use that winch. Well, the cylinder drumhead for that was nice and warm. Anything above the desk was cold, East Coast winds coming down from Nova Scotia, Jesus Christ, biting into me, and I was sitting there freezing to death. So, all of a sudden I says to hell with the lights, and I come over to where the heat drew me to, the cylinder head. I found a burlap bag, and I set it up on this cylinder head. Like I said, the steam was shut off, but the heat had been so terrific that it just kept that cylinder head hot for a long time. So, I sat down on it, and I felt real good. All of a sudden, I put my head down. Next thing, [makes snoring sounds] I’m sound asleep. Lights all around me. Different ships coming and going. From what I hear—a sailor told me later on, he said the mate was all, “Where the hell is that dumb son of a bitch down there in the [?first place?] ? I bet he’s asleep down there! The hell with him. Let him sleep.”

Anyway, I woke up at midnight. The other ordinary seaman was coming to take over the watch. I learned a lot on that ship. Made me a little more comfortable and more secure on the next ship. Like I say, the more you travel, the more habits you learn—good habits—and how to reject the bad ones.

But unions did come on later on, much later. That was from the MWIU, the Marine Workers Industrial Union.

[00:11:05] **HOWARD:** When did you become affiliated with them?

[00:11:07] **BILL:** That was about 1932, I guess.

[00:11:16] **HOWARD:** So you’d been sailing for about 4 years.

[00:11:19] **BILL:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:11:21] **HOWARD:** What attracted you to the Marine Workers Industrial Union?

[00:11:26] **BILL:** A series of things. The first trip to sea, I had ran [sic] into a Wobbly down in Houston. They’d do it the same as we’d done it, the Marine Workers. They’d come aboard the ship whenever they get a chance and hand out literature. He had come aboard, and I was one of the guys he ran into. He handed me a copy of the—what was it, The Transport Worker? The Wobbly paper. Emblazoned on a part of it was the preamble: “The working class and the capitalist class have nothing in common. They’re in one terrific, constant, 24 hours-a-day struggle.” All that stuff, and explaining what the capitalist class does and what the working class should do. How they eventually set themselves up in power with the machinery to end exploitation of man against man, and all that stuff. So, I mean, I read half of it, and, all of a sudden, somebody called me to do something. The guy was trying to talk to me. He starts telling me, he says, “Don’t forget now, you’re a class member.” I couldn’t understand what he meant. Class? He asked me a couple questions, how much wages I get. I told him I was getting \$37.50. He said, “You’d should be getting twice that much.” It was a haphazard type of discussion. Nothing was ever resolved. I just took the paper, thanked him politely for it.

Later on, after we was at sea, on our way home back up the coast, I had a chance to read the paper again. I liked the preamble. After I found out what the hell he meant by “class.”

[00:13:08] **HOWARD:** So, you were politically naïve beforehand?

[00:13:11] **BILL:** [inaudible] \_\_\_\_\_. But when it was explained that a class is somebody who has nothing but his bare hands and his labor power. That's the class you belong to; you ain't got nothing else. The other owns the means of production; they own every goddamn thing. They can determine if you're going to have beefsteak tonight for supper or dead cat. That's the power they got. Starve you or feed you or what. Turn around and turn it up. But, as long as you're a member of the working class and you don't unite yourself with other members of the working class, you're useless. I mean, you're nothing. You're constantly going to be exploited and stepped on, and abused and so on. So the job is to weld the class together for fighting position.

[00:13:56] **HOWARD:** Can I stop you for one second?

[00:13:56] **BILL:** Yeah, sure.

[00:13:58] **HOWARD:** How many people responded to the appeals of the Wobblies at that time?

[00:14:01] **BILL:** On the ship? On that particular ship, nobody. Maybe one other guy or something. A guy by the name of Gunnar Andersen or something. Part Norwegian. "Yeah, you know, good thing, good thing. Well, too bad nobody believes in it. Everybody should believe in a good thing." That's as far as he ever got or ever did go with it. He didn't try to agitate, but he just made the formal statement of the readings. "Yeah, good thing."

[00:14:28] **HOWARD:** Why don't you suppose other men were attracted to that?

[00:14:31] **BILL:** Well, there was a bunch of things. Jobs were hard to get, number one. If you had a job, you already felt you were in a position class, good position because you had a job. You were getting three meals a day. Everybody else was in soup lines, trying to find the address of the new soup kitchen opening up. Here you are, with meals being served to you. You had your [?dunky?] breakfast, your straw bunk, and you're getting paid. You're already in a position where you can't shake the boat, so-called.

Then, besides, they were not in a position, the Wobblies, where they could just walk aboard the ship and say, "Ok, we'll give you one hour to sign a new contract or sign this . . ." No such thing. Because it wasn't that type of service; they had no contract. They just had agreements verbally with somebody. 'You treat us rough, and we'll treat you rough.' That's if it was a ship full of Wobblies. Which was rare. You may get a ship full of militant people, but never a ship full of all registered, paid-up members of the Wobblies, IWW. The influence was there. All seamen have a bit of the old anarchist, Wobbly-influence. You know, rah! You can't get something? You bash it in with your head.

[00:15:38] **HOWARD:** Where did they get that? Do you think they sort of hung around or actual contact with Wobblies?

[00:15:43] **BILL:** That is a hard thing to say because of the very nature of the seaman and the nature of the industry he pursues. That's the type of industry that appeals to that type of man. A nice, refined college kid coming out of law school wouldn't dare think of going on a ship, and going down below in the engine room, and working like a dog, mopping up decks of oil, eating oil and fumes and stuff like that. Being filthy all the time, soaked with oil. I mean, what the hell is going on? The family would probably throw him out, thinking he was insane and asking him to take a trip to see a psychiatrist. But there's others—most guys, if they did it, that would be the novelty.

But most people that went to sea, the firemen, the coalmen, the sailors, came from the background of working class families. Going to sea itself in those days was a lonely life. You had no radios on the ship. You had nothing. You get on ships where there's 15-20 men in a room. Didn't even have a porthole. A running toilet,

running all night. You know the flushing, constant noise. Sometimes the deck where you slept was wet. Guys coughing [makes coughing noises], TB, all night long. Some guys snoring. How the hell did you ever get a night's sleep among these things? You just blew your mind, and just went to bed. Other guys, some type of guys, get up in the middle of the night and pull a bucket of clap medicine from under his bunk. You hear the old syringe, clap clap! The old gun ones. I don't know if you remember.

[00:17:11] **HOWARD:** No.

[00:17:11] **BILL:** But that's where the word "clap" comes in, because, you know, they carried a gun and they used to pick up this potash. They'd pick up the gun, and the gun would sometimes just laying in the bucket like an old mop. But, anyway, they'd get up. "Oh, doctor's orders, here it is, two o'clock, better give myself a shot." So, [makes whooshing noise] you'd pull up the syringe, put in the [inaudible] \_\_\_\_\_, clap! Ram this, uh, . . . then you could hear them! If you walk up, you heard, clap, clap! You'd know it was Andy giving himself a dose of red potash. That was the stuff they used them days for gonorrhea until more, the better stuff came out, like penicillin. But, anyhow, these were the conditions.

[00:18:01] **HOWARD:** So it was very oppressive conditions—

[00:18:02] **BILL:** Very oppressive. And if you opened your mouth in some of these ports—suppose you had a steward who was in league with the captain, in league with the officers, which many were. They'd get into foreign ports, and all your fruit, and good cuts of meat, good steaks and stuff like that, they've got aboard that's normally supposed to go to you, would be sold ashore. Sold to caterers, sons of bitches, and cases of whiskey would be brought aboard for the captains and the officers or whatever were. So you were being denied this stuff. Now suppose you were wise to this racket and you wanted to stir your [?tea?] . Say, "You son of a bitch, when I get back to New York or San Francisco [California] or wherever, I'm going to report you to somebody. You ain't getting away with selling all our store." The steward would run to the engineer or the mate or whoever's responsible. You were fired the next port! They didn't wait until you got back to San Francisco or New York. They got rid of you quickly. Dumped you, found some reason to square you out, get gone.

But that's the way things were. So you had to be careful how you carried on a beef. If you said too much in a foreign port, you may be up for a threat of mutiny against you, or some excuse found to log you a few days' pay. Make it miserable for you, you know?

[00:19:16] **HOWARD:** So what was the role of the Wobblies in this whole thing?

[00:19:18] **BILL:** Well, the Wobblies was an isolated group, and they were mostly down in places like the Gulf. There, they were strong, and up north. Like in the Northwest. There they were very strong because they had been in the logging camps in the Northwest. Down in the Gulf, they had been in the oil fields and stuff like that, railroads. That's where they had been strong. Before the system—if we'll call it "the system"—class system just busted the hell out of them. Locked the leaders up, routed them, stuck them up, beat them up, drove them out to the desert and did all sorts of stuff to kill them. I don't know if you recall the very famous group that was driven out into the—I don't know if it was Texas or Arizona desert—

[00:19:59] **HOWARD:** Bisbee. Deported them to Bisbee, Arizona.

[00:20:00] **BILL:** That's right. That's tragic, just left them out there to die! They don't care about the water. The hell with you, stay out there. Knowing that they'd never get back. But it just happened to be that these type of miracles worked out, and they eventually did get back without any casualties because other people found out what was happening and got transportation to them.

But they were active and strong. Their influence is still strong. If you go to the Northwest now, like Seattle, sections of Portland, the Wobblies are still—they talk about them, revere them. They got branches going to some degree. They got some influence. But, as a whole, the good elements of the Wobblies among the maritime workers came out and came back into the Marine Workers Industrial Union. Those were the guys. They were the backbone of the MWIU. Because certain things that took place within the Wobblies—I mean, they found themselves not going any place at this stage of the game. So it was here that the Marine Workers Industrial Union preamble and the constitution and everything else had more of an appeal and an effect to them. A more class-conscious and cohesive effect. That's why they built the MWIU, but it was the good core of the Wobblies that did it.

[00:21:15] **HOWARD:** Why don't you tell me a little bit about the Marine Workers Industrial Union. Why you affiliated with them? What other workers thought?

[00:21:21] **BILL:** Well, you know the history of the MWIU?

[00:21:23] **HOWARD:** No. Why don't you give that to me?

[00:21:24] **BILL:** Well, one period—I'll just give you the other notes. At one period of time, they called it the TUUL, that is the Trade Union Unity League, which was formed, I think, in the Soviet Union. Thought they had the answer to many of the trade union problems in the United States, or the lack of trade unions in the United States. We had trade unions here. They were dominated by AFL [American Federation of Labor] trade unions. These guys done nothing. No organizing, no nothing. Maybe one union here, they'd go out and hustle a guy in every once in a while, but, as a rule, there was no organizing.

The AFL unions had been in business during the '21 strike and helped to sell that strike out—the national strike, the general strike, and everything else. So there was not great love among maritime workers for the AFL unions, that is the International Seamen's Union [ISU]. They didn't trust the officials, who were still in office despite the fact that they helped to sell the strike out, getting their wages from the general fund of the AFL and so on.

So it was very difficult to talk to the average seaman about joining a union. "What pie card [union official concerned with maintaining good relations with the management] sons of bitches, look at 'em! You're saying you want me to shake hands with the same son of a bitch who sold out the unions only a few years ago, eight, nine years ago?" That was the general attitude: "I don't trust 'em. And I don't trust anybody who's advocating joining that type of union." So you had to be careful in this aspect.

Anyhow, there was that type of a feeling. No faith, no trust, or nothing. And the other feeling sort of evolved about: "What the hell is the sense of me belonging to the union when them eight dumb son of a bitches [sic] over there won't join the union?" That was the paramount stuff.

[00:23:11] **HOWARD:** Still is.

[00:23:14] **BILL:** So your role, if you was class conscious in this effect, your role had to be what? Try to kill, destroy this myth. This business of 'you can't trust the other guy, have no faith in the other guy, and the other guy's going to sell you and screw you all the time.' You had to bust that myth, smash it to pieces some way, and restore confidence in your own fellow worker, plus restore it in yourself.

But, anyway, back to the other story. So, like I say, we had unions here but they were dormant. They wasn't doing nothing. The TUUL, Trade Union Unity League, says, Ok, we're going to ask our people in the United States to start building left-wing unions—or build a union. There'll be an industrial union, like the Marine

Workers Industrial. They'll take in everybody in the maritime industry—solely in the maritime industry. The Garment Workers Industrial Union or whatever, the Stockyards Workers Industrial Union. Everything being industrial unions, and every area where there was a mass group of people, a good size group of people. So, ok, all of a sudden they set up a Marine Workers Industrial Union here in the United States.

[00:24:20] **HOWARD:** This is when, what time period?

[00:24:22] **BILL:** That would be about, what, '28. Maybe '29. '28 more likely. I came into the scene a couple years later. I came into contact with the Wobblies and I didn't react too well outside of, the preamble was nice. It was the first piece of class-conscious literature I had read. But then, like I say, I learned what the whole class meant, and I tried to find my own position here. I felt that something was wrong.

[00:24:52] **HOWARD:** How did you learn what class meant and find your own position?

[00:24:55] **BILL:** I think the preamble itself eventually spelled it out. That you ain't got nothing, therefore you're a member of that class. You get a chance to read the Wobbly preamble, and you'll see it's pretty well, you know.

Anyhow, but like I say, I didn't react. Neither did many other guys on the ship. I think that was frustrating. I could see the look of frustration that I would eventually get, years later, in the organizer's eyes. Here he was, loaded down with papers and literature. Here was all class-conscious men—members of the class, but not class-conscious, but members of the class. And they wasn't conscious of being members of the class. That's frustrating, and they were brushing him aside. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just leave it there. I'll get your paper later." That type of an attitude. So that bears down on you. I guess it's with everybody—people trying to sell you religion or something like that, and you don't buy it. Damn! You know, it gets on your nerves.

Be it as it may, back in New York—but, anyway, I'm on another ship going to London. We had a stowaway aboard, poor son of a bitch. He was an Indian, and he was on his way to India because he got a letter from his mother saying she was dying. India then was under British domination. So, he figured get on any ship going to London, and from London just say, "Hey, I'm an Indian. Send me home." That they would send him home.

So, I'll cut it down real fast. He slept outside in a passageway. It was cold, in the wintertime going across the Atlantic. Friendly guy. We gave him blankets and cigarettes and all that type of stuff. Took care of him as much as we could. When we got to London, we shook hands with him, and the British police—whatever it was, immigration—came aboard and took him off. Five days later we're sailing out of London back to New York, and he appears. The next day, out in the middle of the Atlantic, he appears in our companion room. We said, "What the hell are you doing here?" "Well, the British kept me in jail for the five days. They said I didn't have sufficient papers proving I was an Indian from Bombay. Therefore, they said, 'The hell with you, we're not going to be taking care of every stupid stowaway that comes over here. We're not gonna—go back to New York.' They forced him the skipper of my ship to take him back. Now the officers on our ship are mad as hell because they have to take the guy back to New York. They have to go through all sorts of additional papers and whatnot. Then a big stink about why didn't you search the ship beforehand to make sure there was no stowaways, which you're supposed to do.

So, the guy is very depressed. He's got tears in his eyes. All sorts of weird things are coming into his mind, like, "Do you think if I talk to the captain, and the captain sees another ship passing, that he'll radio him and tell him that I want to go aboard? Maybe the ship is going to India." You couldn't get a lifeboat launched, the seas were so bad. There was lifelines now around the ship. You couldn't even go out on deck, it was so bad, let alone lower a lifeboat. Finally, we persuaded him that it wouldn't work, impossible. Finally, he came to the



conclusion that, if he put on enough clothes, and put on a life jacket, and jumped overboard, that he would float around and some ship would eventually pick him up.

Now I'm down in the boiler room. The guy had something like a dollar and half or two dollars. Everybody should have got wise to it, but nobody did. We thought it was his own type of generous guy. He says, "Bill, I want you to have this." I said, "Have what?" It was \$1.80. "You're crazy!" I said, "I should be giving you money. You'll need it when you get to New—" "No, you should have it. You're a very good man. You give me cigarettes all the time, and you gave me a blanket." I go, "I don't want to hear that type of thing. Take that goddamn money and put it in your pocket." I walked away and went down below in the engine room, down below in the boiler room. And I understand later on that he had done it with several other guys. Did the same thing; tried to give things away: his watch, or whatever it was, nothing of value.

I'm down in the engine room, all of a sudden, boom, boom! The whistle starts blowing, around one o'clock in the afternoon. This is daytime now. I'm on the floor of the [?fire watch?] . I said, "That's a hell of a stupid thing, to be blowing a whistle here in the Atlantic." The whistle they're blowing is "man overboard," or something, you know. Or "abandon ship." I couldn't still get it straight.

So the engineer comes running in here, "Pick up steam! Pick up steam! Pick up steam! We have to maneuver." I didn't know still what the hell was going on. So we lit up more fires because we had most of them banked now because we wasn't making the necessary speed. We're just barely moving. Propeller out of the water all the time. You still needed the ventilator, the natural draft ventilator. You could hear screaming and commotion up on deck. "Short edge, go for a line, go to the port side! Bring two men up here!" All that stuff, and still you didn't know what was going on. After an hour of moving the ship, just going, trying to turn it around, in the weather you don't know if she's going to lay over on her side or not. You're holding on and watching steam pressure. The engineer came in again to make a routine check. I said, "What the hell is going on?" "Some dumb son of a bitch jumped overboard. They think it's that stowaway."

Ah, Jesus Christ. Well, it was impossible to find him. What happened, when he jumped—

[END PART ONE/BEGIN PART TWO]

—come up out of the water, you could almost see the hull underneath. If you look out, you could see the propeller going like hell. Once you settle down in the water, the propeller would chop and shake the whole ship up really. So, consequently, when he jumped, he jumped on a high rise, while we were up on a big wave. He must have went right underneath the hull. When the whole ship came down, it pushed him down, life jacket, goulashes, two overcoats, a couple of shirts, gloves, all that type of stuff. If that didn't get him, then the propeller certainly did when it when it went back in. But they maneuvered I think about an hour and a half. It's customary two hours you're supposed to maneuver to see if you could find the body or see if you can find the guy. It was tough maneuvering, tough doing everything else, trying to turn around. But, anyway, they gave up. If that didn't get him, then the cold water would have got him because up north, the North Atlantic, it was ice cold.

So we came back to New York, and I was pretty sad about the whole thing. In fact, everybody else aboard the ship was sad outside of, say, one guy, the bosun, who said, "If I knew that son of a bitch was going to jump overboard, I would have worked his ass off before that!" You know, made him do extra work. At which time, militancy started to arise. One guy said, "I'd like to work your ass off, you son of a bitch, right now." Right away the hostility came, right. Most of the guys walked out of the mess room and never said another word to the bosun. In fact, through some hocus pocus, he got fired that trip anyway. Just one of them type of things, you know?

Anyway, I'm off the ship, and I'm very disturbed about the thing. There was so much injustice, I said, something finally has to be done. Years of poverty. Now I begin to see poverty no matter where, no matter what port. I'm only used to the poverty in Hell's Kitchen [area of Manhattan in New York City] , or my own poverty in Hoboken [New Jersey] , or my own poverty in Jersey City [New Jersey] . Wherever I lived, there was poverty, poverty, poverty. I was only used to that, and you didn't think that the whole world was full of that until you got to visit it. You found, no matter where you went, whether it was London or [Washington] D.C. Christ, London was depressing. Just the poverty in London, absolutely depressing. Couldn't smoke a cigarette and throw it in the street without two guys diving and pushing and elbowing each other out of the way to grab the cigarette. It was insane, the poverty in England. Couldn't get enough bread, couldn't get enough cigarettes, couldn't get enough nothing. Now can you imagine—

[00:33:02] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question about that. How much did the international context seamen developed have an effect on their political development?

[00:33:12] **BILL:** Much, much so. Much so. That was the advantage seamen had that others didn't have. We could see the makings of these things. We could see the government. Like, you go into Cuba. One trip, I went into Cuba. All of the sudden, I'm walking down the street, someone hollered out, "Hey, hey!" I didn't pay no attention. There's a soldier way down on the end, standing there. I just thought he was guarding some door, for all I knew. All of a sudden, there was people on the other side of the street looking at me, and the guy is howling in Spanish. I didn't know what the hell he was saying. The people standing on the other side of the street gasped. The only time I became really alarmed, when I heard a click, click. Boom! He gave it a fast bolt, and he put a bullet in the chamber. He's getting ready to aim, and the people are, "Ay, ay! Atención, atención!" I looked down, and there's the soldier aiming the gun at me. When I got a good look at him, he's telling me to get away, get on the other side of the street. That's what he was hollering all this time, "Get the hell away from this area. Get on the other side of the street." But I didn't know it.

Then you figure, now, what the hell is going on here? The soldier is out here, what the hell, ready to shoot me just because I'm walking here. Who the hell is in that place? These are the type of things you start wondering about and actually some of these questions. You find out what's happening, that the system is rotten. Some son of a bitch dictator holed up in there or doing anything else. He has to be guarded. He's so popular, he has to have soldiers around him all the time like bandits to keep the people from choking him to death.

[00:34:38] **HOWARD:** How about the Soviet Union? Did it set sort of a model for people during this period?

[00:34:42] **BILL:** When you became class conscious, the class consciousness rubbed off on the Soviet Union because that was the citadel of it. The Soviet Union at that particular time had just got finished with its revolution, right? They picked off the most despotic bastard in the whole world, the czar—dumped him. It was supposed to end all sorts of—like, it ended the pogroms. They set up a Jewish republic in the Soviet Union, Birobidzhan I think it was, which was supposed to be a model. Assumably supposed to have ended all the exploitation, man on man. Instead of working managers, working this, working that, everybody's now equal. Everybody's now known as "comrade citizen" or "comrade." These type of things had appealing effects on people. And you shared. So on. These are the things we visibly read about, see all the time, listen to lectures or speeches or whatever it is. These are the things that were supposedly being portrayed or carried out. Therefore, once you got engaged in the stuff, it had a visible and emotional effect on you.

So seamen were the best people in the world to understand what was going on. I was going to take a seaman's point of view, from his vision, than some guy who just read something in a book or was trying to theorize something in a book. The seaman goes, "Hey, that's not the way it sounded. I just got back from Hong Kong. Man, they're eating each other in that goddamn place. They're standing eight on top of each other." Where

some guy's writing about the great tradition and beauty of Hong Kong—who cares about the beauty of Hong Kong? We're concerned about the class conscious point of view, about the conditions of people, human beings on the planet.

[00:36:26] **HOWARD:** What about on the ships when you weren't working? Was politics discussed very much, or do you remember?

[00:36:31] **BILL:** Yeah, politics was discussed, but there's a difference between politics being discussed when there was no unions and politics being discussed when there were unions. I mean, there's a big difference. Now you're free to discuss any bloody thing you want with a union. But you didn't do that when you had no union. You did it with out the earshot of the officers, the mates, and so on because you knew, if you said something out of the way, you were in trouble. Especially if it didn't go with the mate. The mate would say we have a communist aboard or a Bolshevik.

Let me give you an example. I was on a ship, the [SS] Mundixie. Munson [Steamship] Line ship, only paid \$30/month. Firings and, jeez, the low wages. It was—I can't think of the bank. One of the biggest banks in the United States at the time that controlled the Munson Line. They had a big fleet of ships, 40, 50, 60 ships, running all up and down the East Coast all the way into South America. They paid lousy wages; the food was lousy. They didn't give you enough food. I remember taking my plate when I tried to get seconds of supper. That night it was one boiled potato, two goddamn hot dogs, two slices of bread, three or four prunes in a dish; and that was a supper. Here I am a young guy. Christ, I could eat the typewriter! Eat twice that much had I did any hard work, which that day I did. I come up in the mess room, put my plate in. The cook did, put the two hotdogs, boiled potatoes, throws everything in, and pushes it out. It was enamel plates. Enamel plates, no crockery plates. Enamel. If you dropped on of them, you chip it all. Sometimes you'd cut meat or something with a knife, and you may be eating part of it, the enamel. The bastards.

But, be as it may, I put the plate in for extra more. The cook said, "You don't get anymore. You ate 11¢ worth. That's all you're going to get for this meal." That was how he equated everything. Each meal was supposed to be equated 8¢ a meal, 10¢, 15¢. Whatever it is to feed people. He tells me, "You already had your ration." I said, "Screw you, man, I'm goddamn hungry." "No, you ain't getting nothing more from me." It was a Chinese cook by the way. I says, "Ok, I'll see about that." I took my plate and went out to the goddamn bridge of the ship. Climbed up the bridge of the ship in a snowstorm. Walked in, and the skipper is standing there, and the chief mate and a sailor at the wheel. I had this empty plate, and I said, "Captain, this is all you feed the men on this ship. You might as well turn this ship around and set me back on the dock because I can't work on two hotdogs and a boiled potato." The skipper—nobody'd ever done that—this guy was in a state of shock. He tried to be very calm, but you could see it was trouble right off the bat. He tells the mate, "Mr. Mate, take this man below, and tell the steward I want this man to be given more to eat." That was the end of that.

When I had stepped out the door first, since I was the first one out, expecting the mate to come trailing, I heard the mate say, "Looks like we've got a Wobbly aboard." That was clear as a bell, and the skipper said nothing.

But that was what I'm trying to impress on you. Open your mouth, you was a Wobbly. Like it was today: criticize something, you're a communist. Criticize nuclear power. You're a communist if you oppose it. It's how you label a brand.

Be as it may, I got all I wanted. The cook was in a state of shock when the mate said, "I don't care. Feed him. Give him more! That's our captain's orders. Feed this man! I don't want to hear anymore bullshit. Feed this man!" Cook said, "Alright, alright, alright!" Starts throwing more food on the plate. I just sat there gloating to all these guys who had to take this for a long period of time. And my comment was, "See? If you guys open up

your goddamn mouth, like men, then you'll get taken care of." Of course, guys didn't want to hear that. They didn't want to be—

[00:40:38] **HOWARD:** Even after you demonstrated that it worked?

[00:40:38] **BILL:** It worked on them, but they didn't want that rubbed in. So I ate my hot dog and left the mess room. But it made the impression on them. The net result, the end result, worked perfect. We struck the ship later on, a day later in Baltimore.

But, anyhow, to get back to this other thing, the formation of the MWIU, wasn't it? Was that the subject?

[00:41:01] **HOWARD:** Yeah, that's right.

[00:41:02] **BILL:** I came in contact with it after I decided that something had to be done. We had to fight back some way. How the hell do you fight back? There was a union in New York called the American Seamen's Union. Run by a guy named Smith, and he was a notorious bastard. He felt the only way to get guys—his program was, "Chase the foreigners off the ship." That there was so many foreigners on the ship that there was no room for Americans. But then, seamen were that way because you were—even if you had chased all the foreigners off the ship, there would have been so much room you would have had to bring half of them back because so many ships were running. The ships that he was talking about were mostly in contact with outfits called the United States Line that ran from New York to London, New York to Germany, New York to France. They were big passenger ships, and most of the waiters were young German guys. When it was running to Germany, it was all German guys—which the company wanted because they communicated with the passengers. One of the ships that ran to France there were a lot of French guys on them who spoke good English, et cetera.

So, he appealed. He had that type of appeal—which is a phony appeal, chasing the foreigners off the ship. Picking people out. Chase the Jews out; chase the Irish off; chase whoever it was, the group you want to play with, dilly-dally around. That's bad business. But he also had another thing. He had a restaurant in his union headquarters, if you could call a union headquarters. It wasn't a big room. He had two fried eggs, good-size spoonful of potatoes, a cup of coffee, and two slices of toast for 10¢. Even if you didn't believe what the son of a bitch was talking about—"We gotta get rid of all the foreigners! Get rid of them Germans!"—you went to the place primarily to get two eggs for 10¢ instead of going all the way from the West Side all the way over to the Bowery, which was a mile from one end of New York to the other, west to east. You went to his place, got the eggs, and you had to listen to him. You couldn't eat the eggs without him ranting about how we got to do this, we got to do that.

Anyhow, the union, he never got no place with the union because it can't with that type of policy. Nobody in their right mind wants to get involved with that. But the marine workers on the other end of town, down in the battery, was active. They were out there every day putting out propaganda leaflets, visiting ships, doing everything, trying to get things stirred up. Now and then you'd see them on a soapbox where a bunch of seamen, longshoremen, were talking about organizing.

[00:43:30] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question. How many do you think were involved in the Marine Workers Industrial Union? How many organizers, do you have any sense of that?

[00:43:36] **BILL:** Almost everybody was an organizer to some degree, but the more articulate guys, they'd pull out. Let's say in New York City—this is rough guessing because it's now quite a many years back. I'm just trying to get a picture. I'd say they had, the POC, what they called "POC," which was a port organizing

committee. Those are the guys that would meet every morning, map out plans of how many ships they're going to visit and what they're going to do with the program. The program they would write out the day before, what to do. Ok, I'd say there was about sometimes 10 men. Maybe the secretary would be around the office most of the time, doing book work or doing something else. I'd say maybe 10 men. Rest of the guys leave 8 o'clock in the morning loaded down with literature. They'd travel to every ship, over to Brooklyn, wherever there was a ship. Then they had guys concentrating over in Brooklyn on tankers. They sometimes stayed over there for maybe a week or two and come over, have meetings just to report on progress. So you had a good, active group of guys. Except that, as I say, they was not getting highly paid. They were lucky to get even room and board. I went out on a job one time when I became active in the Marine Workers. I got on a port organizing committee, and I went out to visit ships with an old timer who was going to take me out to break me in. All we got was a nickel for the subway up—we had to go uptown—a nickel for the ride back, and 10¢. That 10¢ was to buy a bowl of soup with for lunch. That was it. You got a big bundle of literature, a nickel up, and a nickel back, and 10¢ for a bowl of stew in case you couldn't get anything to eat aboard the ship. If you're lucky and get aboard the ship, say, at noon time, maybe you might run into some friendly guys that say, "Come on in here. Sit down among us, and have something to eat." But that wasn't all the time.

[00:45:31] **HOWARD:** What was the nature of the propaganda that you were handing out?

[00:45:34] **BILL:** Building a union against the ship owners. That was it.

[00:45:38] **HOWARD:** So, it wasn't so much political in nature as it was—

[00:45:42] **BILL:** It was class-conscious trade union-type literature. There was other literature that you kept for yourself. You kept for maybe a more political, astute guy who you may find very—if you found somebody who was very friendly to the MWIU, you'd hand them this other leaflet, but sometimes it was a higher political level. Or else it was an announcement of events taking place, or some big, mass rally, or maybe a petition. It was something, but there was constantly something going on all the time. No dead—no vacuum existing with the MWIU, they had something going on all the time. A mass march on City Hall, kick Jimmy Walker, kick him in the ass, get him on his toes for more relief for people, or against evictions. Something going all the bloody time.

[00:46:35] **HOWARD:** Do you remember any of the marches? How many people participated or anything like that?

[00:46:40] **BILL:** Well, we had one march. That march was for home relief for students. It was in a bloody blizzard, we started. It started out with the soapboxes. The weather was not nice; it was just cold, wintertime, but it wasn't snowing. Ok, and at 1 o'clock we're going to meet at James Street in New York City, outside of Seamen's Institute. We're going to harangue everybody around there. From there, we're going to march all the way up West Street, up all across 23rd Street, to, maybe, someplace near Broadway, somewhere in the Garment District. Maybe around Thirty-fourth Street, where there was some organization that dealt with seamen's relief or relief in general. We were going to put the heat on them.

Well, ok, so after the haranguing went on, all right, form ranks! Only about 25 guys. Not much of an army, right? Anyway, we had one guy who blew a bugle. I think he blew "Solidarity Forever" or "The Internationale"—whatever the hell it was, it was more or less "The Internationale." [anthem of International Communist Movement] We started out. When we had reached Twentieth Street from James Street, which is, what, maybe about a dozen blocks, about 10 more guys joined. About 23rd Street we passed a couple more small-time seamen's missions or institutes, a hangout for seamen. Maybe about 25 more joined in there. "Come on down, join the parade," and all that.

Across town we went, in a blinding snowstorm. Snow came down like it had never came down. Jesus Christ! We had to go through the Garment District. We went through the Garment District, I think, about 3 o'clock. It was almost night time when we went through because it was snowing like hell. Dark as hell. He's blowing "The Internationale," and if that didn't draw attention from almost every window in the Garment District. They start opening. All the girls [clapping], "Yeah!" It was really a moment. Looking back on it now, a scraggly pack of goddamn seamen going through the snowstorm but receiving so much adulation from people just because we were blowing "The Internationale," giving them the treatment that we were going to fight like hell.

We get into this place where the ship owners are supposed to be, and of course they stalled and did everything. We sent a delegation in. Of course, they promised everything underneath the sun. We broke up there and came back. When the delegation came down from a nice, comfortable, warm office, Jesus Christ, all the guys standing around, covered with snow. It was real pathetic, but a guy mounted a soapbox somewhere and started telling everybody what happened upstairs. They promised this and promised that. That was it. We all broke ranks and straggled back as fast as we could to something more comfortable or a warm place. That was only one demonstration. There was others and had been others. That was the most memorial [sic] one because of all the windows opening up and the International Ladies Garment Workers, that group in that area applauding.

[00:50:08] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question. Did most workers view the Marine Workers Industrial Union as sort of a communist-front union?

[00:50:15] **BILL:** Well, not as a communist front because the communist front—that wasn't a word that was used. Well, the "red union" or "communist union" or "friendly with the Russians" or stuff like that. Like I say, it appealed to guys who understood a certain amount of class consciousness, that wanted to do something, and they wanted some honesty in doing it. The only outfit existing at that time was the Marine Workers Industrial Union because the Wobblies exist. But they wasn't doing nothing. No actions at all. When the MWIU was calling strikes, getting conditions on the ships. Some ships, where they would pull a strike in some places, and they'd get some halfway decent conditions. They were places that were in ports like Baltimore or Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]. Well, you're in civilization in the sense that you get a load of scabs, put them in the launch, climb aboard the ships. Or you had the police friendly to ship owners, and they'd scatter you and get the gang of scabs in and sail the ship. That's the way it went. But there's other times when they couldn't do that. The ship owners, the captain would promise better food, I'll do this and do that. That was a big victory. You'd played it for what it was. I forget the name of them pamphlets, jeez. I don't know how the hell I'd ever get to them, the pamphlets, or if libraries would have them. But there were some pamphlets that Marine Workers Industrial Union put out, little throwaways, nickel pamphlets. Told you the story about this particular ship or that ship. I can't even think of the name of them. Goddamn memory is failing.

[00:51:44] **HOWARD:** I found two. One was called "The Centralized Shipping Bureau."

[00:51:47] **BILL:** Oh! That sounds very familiar. Harry Alexander was the chairman of that, a good friend of mine. He's dead. He died in New Orleans, last year or the year before.

But the name of the ships—the Centralized Shipping Bureau was a little set up put up by the Marine Workers Industrial Union that guaranteed everybody got equal shot at shipping without any discrimination or money under the counter.

[00:52:10] **HOWARD:** Now, the Marine Workers Industrial Union didn't try to hide the fact that they were affiliated or close to the TUUL, did they?

[00:52:15] **BILL:** Oh, no, no, no.

[00:52:18] **HOWARD:** They were very upfront about it.

[00:52:19] **BILL:** No. If anybody should ask you—also, see, also we were members of the ISH. ISH was the International Seamen and Harbor Workers of the World. That was what the MWIU was affiliated with. Marine Workers Industrial Union affiliated with ISH, International Seamen Harbor Workers. Now, the International Seamen Harbor Workers was the parent body, so-called, of the maritime unions. When you go abroad, any place you went, you didn't even have to say you were a member of the Marine Workers Industrial Union. You just said—you wore an ISH button, and they'd recognize that because they had a similar union that was a left union. The Moscow edict came out that all countries are going to set up like the ISH or set up like the Marine Workers Industrial Union. The United States, there'd be the Marine Workers Industrial Union, and in Copenhagen or someplace else would have a different name. But they would be affiliated with the ISH. Then the ISH would be affiliated with the TUUL, Trade Union Unity League or one more name or some other name attached to it.

But, be as it may, the average maritime worker that joined the Marine Workers Industrial Union was, to some degree, already class-conscious.

[00:53:37] **HOWARD:** How many people joined, or what kind of an impact did it have? I realize it's difficult.

[00:53:41] **BILL:** Numbers are almost impossible.

[00:53:41] **HOWARD:** Sure.

[00:53:41] **BILL:** You'd have to—god, I don't even know who the hell I could even find who'd have such information. But you can only go by, well, sometimes you'd have a meeting of workers, say in Baltimore, and there's be, what, 75 who'd show up. Which was a lot. Sometimes you'd have one on Broad Street. They'd announce a meeting of the marine workers. The members would be maybe 125. That's sometimes; sometimes maybe only 25 around there.

So it's difficult. You had them in San Francisco and Seattle; every major port had a Marine Workers Industrial Union office. So it's pretty difficult to actually say how many dues-paying members was in the Marine Workers Industrial Union.

[00:54:33] **HOWARD:** Would you say it was less than 10 percent of the seamen?

[00:54:36] **BILL:** I would say that, yes. I would say less than 10 percent. I'll tell you why. Because when the '34 strike took place, and the seamen voted. They had the vote, what they want. Do they want the Marine Workers Industrial Union now to be the major union to represent them on the West Coast, or did they want the International Seamen's Union, which was the old AF of L, that wasn't representing them. So they decided at that time, the maritime workers did and I guess that was the whole left, too, that since they had won the strike, and while being on strike they had created a major, good influence on the officials of the ISU by kicking most of them out, running them out of town, and taking control of the union, the union was now in halfway decent hands. It was in the hands of the experienced guys who had been on strike for one-hundred-some days. So therefore, when the vote came up, they said, yes, let's vote for the ISU.

Well, I was at a meeting in New York when this information was handed out. It was a sort of the last meeting of all the Marine Industrial Workers delegates from all over the country. We'd come together to decide on this issue. Should we now operate, say, just on the East Coast as the MWIU, or should we now disband the MWIU and everybody tell their other members to go join the ISU? If we decided on one hand that we would continue, then that would mean that we would become a dual organization. We'd be in deeper trouble.

[00:56:18] **HOWARD:** You already were a dual organization.

[00:56:20] **BILL:** Now, well, absolutely. But they didn't care in a sense, because nobody was joining the ISU. And the ISU officials weren't too happy about, come on, bringing in members. They wasn't doing a goddamn thing, so all we're acting as somebody trying to get underneath them and tickle them a little bit so they can rise every now and then.

So, ok, we decided to disband and tell our members to join the ISU. I was one of them. Since I wasn't too well known in that area, South Street—how the hell did it happen? I think I, yes, I went down and joined the union. I went to Jersey, went to a shipmaster over there. The American Export Line. I got a job. Now, they didn't have control of the ship, but they had a contract. One of them sweetheart contracts [agreement between employer and union which is favorable to the employer with little input from union members] that a company signs that said, "Yeah, you have the right. If a member on our ship wants to join the union, that's his prerogative." That type of a contract. So, as soon I got the job on a ship, an oiler on a ship called the Exchange, I had, ah-ha my shipping card. That was my entrance into the ISU, so I ran over and said I want to join the union. The guy thought I was crazy. That was the view of everybody who wants to join a union and give money to a union that's not doing nothing, right? So I said, "I just come from a tradition of good union families. My mother told me always join a union." So the guy goes, "Ah, your mother knows her stuff. Ok." \$10, he gave me my membership book.

Of course, a number of months later, after the Bremen incident [anti-Nazi demonstration in New York], they did expel me. Based on the fact—one guy was on the trial committee, and when he would question me, his answer was, "What right have you to go aboard our ships and pull our flag down?" Man! I was furious. "Well, what right have you Nazi bastards to go aboard our ships," which was the Manhattan, in [inaudible] \_\_\_\_\_, in Hamburg, "and take Lawrence Simpson," who was our guy, "and put him in a concentration camp? What right have you Nazi bastards?" Well, of course, just a splashing of words around, and he shut up and I shut up.

As it was, we got expelled, the three of us. [?Harry Alexander?], myself, and a guy by the name of Smithy Hopkins, one of the first three to be expelled from the International Seamen's Union when they started their drive to weed out all the left wingers. Then they started getting panicky because left wingers started to come in and show a great influence. What little pipsqueak meetings they had, they now found them turning into rousing rejuvenation of the union. Guys getting up and calling, demanding that officials get off their ass and organize. Voluntary committee go out and organize. These are the old guys coming in from the Marine Workers Industrial Union starting to rile things up so the officials said, "Jesus Christ, we gotta get rid of these bastards, or we're not going to be around long. Expel 'em!" So they were expelling us in groups. When I got expelled along with Smithy and [?Harry Alexander?]. I think 4 or 5 guys were being expelled the same night in Baltimore, in the branch down there. So it was going on all the time, getting rid of the Left. Getting rid of the left, and trying to get back to the old ways of making it secure for the officials.

[00:59:48] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you two questions about this. Since my research really addresses the question of the longshoremen, do you have any recollection of what kind of an impact the Marine Workers had on longshoremen?

[00:59:59] **BILL:** Let me give you a couple of guys. One guy was Tommy Ray, who's since died last year or the early part of this year in New York. Tommy Ray and Harry Hines, who was an Australian, and that name may come up sometime. Harry Hines. He was an Australian maritime worker, a dear friend of mine. He died in Spain. Just unbelievable. Man got shot, put a bullet through the jugular vein, being carried on a stretcher to the first aid. He sees some guy shot in the leg limping along, and he tells the stretcher man to wait on him. "This man needs the stretcher better than I do." He puts the guy in; he walks up 50 feet, and he keels over dead. But that's the type of character he was. Solid all around.



[01:00:45] **HOWARD:** I've been reading about him in Al Richmond's book. Have you seen that?

[01:00:47] **BILL:** Oh, yeah, he was great. But, anyhow, be as it may, Harry Hines and Tommy Ray and a couple other guys who were killed in Spain. Al Kaufman. . .

[END PART TWO/BEGIN PART THREE]

Majorly, major, after he was taking care of seamen of the Marine Workers Industrial Union, was also—had his finger in everything possible that had to do with marines. That was the nature of the left-wing union. So, naturally, they wasn't just satisfied with what was taking place on a ship. They made themselves aware and knowledgeable about what was taking place on the dock. You have the same boss, the same ship owner. But they were constantly agitating longshoremen and so on. In them days we had either blue book unions or fink hall unions, old books you carried, or nothing. So, naturally they were in there. They had been doing a lot of agitating among longshoremen, like, for instance, the soapbox meeting. How could you have a soapbox meeting outside of a pier at noontime where you're trying to address the seamen aboard the ship, and not say something to the longshoremen? It was perfect. Longshoremen and seamen; it was absolutely perfect. So they were an influence about telling longshoremen to get organized, to get into the union. We got the same enemy, the ship owner. Seamen and longshoremen unite and fight, and all that type of stuff. Had a great influence on the strike when it did take place in 1934.

[01:02:26] **HOWARD:** On the West Coast.

[01:02:27] **BILL:** On the West Coast. Now, when they had left, guys like Tommy Ray and Harry Hines, Kaufman, Joe Bianca, people like that, they had a lot of friends on the West Coast, especially in San Francisco. A lot of longshoremen. I'm sure that if you get a chance to talk to [?Neils Lang?] , he may be knowledgeable about this, too. But they helped also to make sure the literature got to the longshoremen every day and that guys were brought in and talked to and so forth. So the nucleus, the seed of the formation of the beginning of the '34 strike was being laid around '29-'30.

[01:03:07] **HOWARD:** What about in New York? Did the Marine Workers concentrate more on seamen, as opposed to longshoremen, or do you remember?

[01:03:14] **BILL:** We had a couple of guys, and I'm trying to think of one of the guys' names. Flattery, or something, might have been the organizer among the longshoremen. We had an Irish guy—I think his name was Burke—who was supposed to do work among longshoremen. In this case, it wasn't so much marine workers. Marine workers, like I say, the leadership of it were party guys.

So they were responsible now, on the other hand, to the party, too. And the party would say, "Ok, fellas, we're going to have a section meeting tonight, and we're going to discuss the whole waterfront situation." So they'd meet, and there'd be guys from Brooklyn, guys from the oil tank area, boarding house area, all that stuff. They'd all meet, and the party would relate the whole problem, 'what's going on in the union?' 'How do we build the union?' and so on. So everybody would give reports of what the hell is happening, what progress they're making. "All right, we're working with longshoremen; what's happening down the Pier 26? I understand there's a big beef down there. Explain it." "Yeah, this and that, somebody tried to do away with this, to collect dues, and there was a big fight." But there was something going on all the time. And, how many contacts? Are you making any contacts among that gang? What's happened at the last ILA meeting? What could be done. Can we get a leaflet out? Do you think we should get a leaflet out, put it out in the middle of the night someplace, lay it around the piers and longshoremen can pick it up.

All these things were discussed and planned. Nothing came that we didn't plan. You had to have organization behind you.

[01:04:44] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question about that. In the longshore industry on the East Coast, you have a phenomenal where the ILA is a fairly durable, viable organization. There's nothing among the seamen. Did that—

[01:04:54] **BILL:** What are we talking about? What period now?

[01:04:57] **HOWARD:** Late '20s, early '30s.

[01:04:58] **BILL:** Right, right, right.

[01:05:00] **HOWARD:** What I'm wondering is, was it easier for the Marine Workers Industrial Union then to work among seamen because they didn't have to worry quite so much about repression from conservative leadership?

[01:05:11] **BILL:** First of all, we were the Marine Workers Industrial Union. Main concentration was on transportation. Longshoring was secondary, and, besides, longshoring was a tough wallop. It was much easier to get aboard a ship and talk to a bunch of unorganized seamen. But it was more difficult to try to open up a soapbox stand outside of a pier and talk to some of the longshoremen because they'd send the gangsters, Ryan would send the gangsters there. Take the goddamn chair and flat bar and smash it across your head, destroy it, and chase you up the street. This was a weekly occurrence.

[01:05:42] **HOWARD:** So, just for tactical reasons, you had to concentrate on seamen.

[01:05:45] **BILL:** We had women down there putting our leaflet. You figure they won't beat up a woman. These guys was murderers, punching women around. We had some volunteers, school teachers, who'd come down. Left-wing school teachers who had time on their hands who said, "Yeah, I'll take that bundle of literature and distribute it." Man, they're getting kicked around and stepped on. Gangsters are gangsters; they wasn't going to let—Joe Ryan wasn't going to let anybody come down and take charge of his union.

[01:06:16] **HOWARD:** So, the Marine Workers did basically concentrate on seamen as opposed to longshoremen?

[01:06:19] **BILL:** That's right.

[01:06:20] **HOWARD:** Was that true on the West Coast, or do you know?

[01:06:22] **BILL:** That was true on the West Coast, too. Seamen was the main focus.

[01:06:27] **HOWARD:** For the same sorts of reasons? Because of repression—

[01:06:31] **BILL:** No, no, no, no. Here it was much, little different. Well, Joe Ryan may have controlled the whole national picture. You had a little different situation. There wasn't a situation ever where you could put up a soapbox, and some gangsters came down and beat the hell out you. Our guy wouldn't allow that here too well. Just a different group of guys on the east coast than there is on the West Coast. I mean, they're a little more sympathetic. There's more unions operating in a place like the West Coast, especially San Francisco. This was not a virgin town for unions. I mean, there's unions all over the place, except that there wasn't a strong left union on the waterfront. Or there wasn't any more powerful left union in the city. But there were unions. Being

unions, they did have some feeling for other people and for other humans. In New York, we didn't have unions. What the hell did you have in New York or the East Coast? You had nothing. Had a few unions, maybe garment workers, store workers.

[01:07:37] **HOWARD:** Do you think that the Marine Workers were a little more successful on the West Coast than the East Coast, in terms of their impact on seamen and longshoremen?

[01:07:45] **BILL:** Hmm, let me see. Seems like back in the East Coast we had more territory to work, more responsibility. We had coal colliers, oil tankers. And yet, the Marine Workers played a big role on the West Coast during the '34 strike. It was greatly influenced to help to clean the unions out. It is hard to say.

[01:08:29] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question. I'll tell you one of the things that I'm looking at in the research. I'm arguing that, among longshoremen, the Marine Workers Industrial Union had a much greater impact on the west coast than they did in New York. How does that sit with your—

[01:08:44] **BILL:** Let's say we pass that by.

[01:08:46] **HOWARD:** Ok, just looking at the longshoremen, not the seamen. Maybe that isn't correct to do. If we just focus on the longshoremen. I'm arguing that on the West Coast the Marine Workers had a much bigger impact than they did on the East Coast.

[01:08:58] **BILL:** The Marine Workers Industrial Union.

[01:09:00] **HOWARD:** Yeah, right.

[01:09:03] **BILL:** In this case, I'd have to agree with you because much of the stuff they'd done had helped to bring about the '34 strike and give it encouragement. It wasn't easy here, you know, in a sense. You had a lot of seamen. You had a lot of unemployed. When I came here in '29—I was 30 when I came here to San Francisco. I walked into the fink hall to see if there was any jobs. There must have been a thousand guys. Killed you with smoke, just trying to walk in there. There was no jobs on the board. Guys sitting around playing pinochle. You walk down to Clay Street, to all the different seamen's missions. They were all sitting around playing pinochle. It was seamen, seamen, seamen. Tons of them. But nobody working.

Now, in the meantime, you got a soup kitchen going here. Soup kitchen going there. But you've got constant agitation among Marine Workers Industrial Union, doing something. Getting ships, getting jobs, and so on. So this made it possible that when the '34 strike came, at least with all this agitation, with all this work that the Marine Workers are centralizing on the West Coast, that did help to make it possible for these guys to step off the ship and come out and make a big strike out of it. That part is true. We didn't have that on the East Coast, that type of challenge. We couldn't get guys. Maybe one ship here, a ship some other place, in another port, Philadelphia. We made a big federal case out of it. Made a pamphlet out of it. Whenever you get a ship that you can hold for two or three days in port, and you won the conditions out of it, man, we immediately got on the presses and wrote a big story. How it happened. Joe Blow Militant went in there, and he told the captain . . . We gave a side-by-side setup because it was a big victory. No matter how small it was, to us, it was tremendous. We had won something. Where, on the West Coast now, we wouldn't dare think of publishing a pamphlet on a little thing like a one day shot. On the West Coast, you had a general strike. Masses of people on the picket line.

[01:10:58] **HOWARD:** So that overall—

[01:10:58] **BILL:** I would guess, I would have to go along with that. I would guess you're right. Overall they did have major influence on the West Coast.

[01:11:10] **HOWARD:** Why do you think that was so? Did it have anything to do with the legacy of the Wobblies?

[01:11:13] **BILL:** I think it does. But, no, I think that part of it—and also the nature of the West Coast seamen over the East Coast ones. We drew a lot of men. There's an old saying, the word "scissorbill", the word "Mathews County". These are words that strictly came, arose back East for a guy who didn't want to do anything. He was not militant, did not want to belong to the union. He was just a big work ox. He'd sit at the table and eat up everything. A "scissorbill" is an old Wobbly expression meaning the same thing. "Mathews County" there's a place in Virginia called Mathews County, and they had used Mathews County guys one time to break a strike. "Come on down, we'll feed you. We'll clothe you. Do everything else." From then on, that became "Mathews County Hoosier" or "scissorbill" or stuff like that. All mashed together between the Marine Workers and the Wobblies, meshing these types of things together.

Now, West Coast, you didn't have that too much. You had characters who just like to sail to the Orient, the Philippines, where on the East Coast guys just wanted to sail to France and England, the Mediterranean. That was their territory. They didn't care about China. They didn't care about Japan. The hell with all them goddamn countries. But, on the West Coast, you had the same guys who said, "The hell with Paris! Where is Paris? Where is Germany?" Here they were just strictly West Coast guys. And then they had steam schooners. Steam schooners is the best things in the world. You had fresh food every day, fresh milk—the best of foods. You got yourself on a steam schooner, you were practically home every couple of nights with the wife, if you had a family. You couldn't get them things back East. There was no such thing.

[01:13:04] **HOWARD:** Why?

[01:13:04] **BILL:** Because steam schooners just ran from, say, up to the lumber ports. Two nights later, they're back in San Francisco, unloading their lumber. But just plain lumber; they carried nothing but lumber.

[01:13:17] **HOWARD:** So it was a lot more coastwise traffic.

[01:13:19] **BILL:** That's right.

[01:13:19] **HOWARD:** Where on the East Coast, it was a lot more foreign.

[01:13:21] **BILL:** More foreign, but they also had coastwise trade back in the East, and that was in coal colliers. They seemed to be a little faster, the coal colliers, for some reason. Unless you was a Boston man, or a Norfolk man, or stuff like that, because those are two major ports. New York, East River. But the best ones, I say, was the steam schooner. The old slogan was, "Go west to get yourself a steam schooner. Make a bundle." Of course, the sailors worked part-longshoring. There was always that condition. Some ports they ran into—well, the sailors always had a tradition, on steam schooners only. Say there was a three-hold job, they call it. Three-hold job, longshoremen got two holds on a steam schooner, and the other hold was allowed to be worked by the sailors or crew members. And they got paid for that. Time off, when they wasn't on a watch, they'd come out, get down, and load lumber. Do what it was, and they got the wages for it. Extra pay. On top of your wages, you got this bonus of working longshore. So that was all extra. That's why I say they made good. And they homesteaded the ships; sometimes guys had been on for ages, years, and those son-of-a-bitches wouldn't get off.

[01:14:36] **HOWARD:** In those ports, a number of seamen became longshoremen. Is that correct? I mean, in New York and the West Coast—

[01:14:41] **BILL:** Well, it was a tradition that you stayed within the industry, or you tried to stay within the industry. Unless you were so disgusted with it, you wanted to get out and run off to Salt Lake City [Utah] or someplace to get away from a ship. But we've had guys—let's take, for instance, in the Sailors Union of the Pacific [SUP], using that as a good example. Most of the guys who were sailors, when they got sick of sailing, they became longshoremen. And it was an ideal situation. They're doing exactly the same work: raising booms, lowering booms, on the winches, loading cargo down below. That'd be what they'd be doing aboard the ship, except be away from home, taking the ship out to sea, leaving the family. But, once they got married and settled down, then they said, ok, become a longshoreman. They give up the idea of going away to sea and be home every night.

[01:15:41] **HOWARD:** I suppose the same thing took place on the East Coast?

[01:15:43] **BILL:** Well, not too much, no. No, I wouldn't say that.

[01:15:48] **HOWARD:** Why?

[01:15:50] **BILL:** Many of the guys I know, back in New York, longshoremen, many Italians. The whole neighborhood, several piers, maybe all the piers in Greenpoint were all Italian. Then the other piers would be all Irish. Maybe a pier or two Scandinavian. These guys are not seamen; maybe some of them were seamen, but predominantly they were just plain guys who come to the United States because of contacts or because of the brutal work. Because of language difficulties and everything, ended up without any great education. And where do you end up without any education? Working like a mule someplace.

[01:16:35] **HOWARD:** When a seaman on the East Coast retired, what did he do then?

[01:16:39] **BILL:** When he retired, that was it.

[01:16:41] **HOWARD:** I mean, they didn't become longshoremen or something?

[01:16:42] **BILL:** No, longshore work was a son of a bitch back East. I did a little bit of it, as a kid. I did it because one of the guys in the tenement house I stayed in was a walking boss. He was Irish, and my mother used to badger him every day. She'd hear him coming up the stairs and dash out. "Paddy Flinn, you son of a bitch, you black Irish! You're not doing my boy right! Why don't you give him a job?" He'd try to creep upstairs, but she had sharp ears. Finally, one day he says, "Send him down the pier." Ok, there was a shape-up. I come down, and I didn't want to go to work. I was going to go home and stay in bed, sleep late or something, go to shows, do all kinds of mischievous things. Whoever wants to go to work? Anyhow, "You, come here." Pulls me in from the shape-up, and it was sad that day. I'm a kid, and all the old timers around there begging for a job. Family men. But ok, "You, get in." "Me?" "Yeah, you, get in, you snotty-nosed son of a bitch. Get in there. When I say 'get in there', get in there."

[01:17:43] **HOWARD:** How old were you?

[01:17:44] **BILL:** I guess I was about 16 or 15 and a half.

[01:17:47] **HOWARD:** Describe the work if you can.

[01:17:48] **BILL:** Well, that pier, Pier 66, was it 66 or 88? It was on Twenty-fifth Street. I think it was Pier 88. Besides that, it was all hand trucks. Big hand trucks. So a big barge would come in, a railroad barge, loaded down with about 20 freight trains, tied up. Our job would be open up all doors in the morning, and put big ramps up. Bring out these ramps, big like gangways, line them up to this barge, and then walk up there, drag a

big goddamn hand truck. It was always up, never down. Never made easy for you. If the tide was really in, the barge would be way up. More difficult. Puffing and huffing. And then you would be assigned to work your bus car or whatever it was. It was just general cargo that was coming in from all other places, railroad depots, whatnot, to be shipped, either overseas or what. So you'd get the stuff out of the box car, go down the gangway into the pier, find out the section where you're wanted, and neatly pile it up in that area. Trucks then would come and probably pick it up, take it out, and take it to other piers for foreign shipment, or stores, or what the hell that it was. But you were going all the time. And the work was very hard, especially for me not familiar with it for at least the first few weeks.

You know, you got a bale of cotton on the truck, which weighed 500, 600, or 700 pounds, and you didn't know how to handle it, you flew up in the air. And you lost your load. Somehow, no matter what you did, the son-of-a-bitch work boss was always standing there. If you broke something or wheeled something out or dropped a load. You were running all the time. There was no walking, taking it easy. In the wintertime, it was horrible because the part of the gangway in between the barge and the pier was open, exposed to the elements. There'd be snow. You go down there with a truck, big hand truck, and the object was, to keep from racing, was to cut the wheel in sideways, where you almost walked down. One wheel burned the side of the lip that was up on one part of the gangway, the wedge. So you rolled it down, fearful that way, if you have stood it out too much, the wheel would run away from you. The truck would run away, and you'd go down the gang, down the plank. But you learn these things. You have to learn them, otherwise you're fired the next day.

[01:20:37] **HOWARD:** How long did you work there as a longshoreman?

[01:20:38] **BILL:** I worked there three months. I worked like a son of a bitch.

[01:20:41] **HOWARD:** Did you work regularly for the three months?

[01:20:43] **BILL:** Yeah, that's right. Because he had committed himself to my mother, "All right, send him down." So she wasn't going to let him get by. And I was bringing home 79¢/hour.

[01:21:02] **HOWARD:** What year was this, about?

[01:21:04] **BILL:** I can't remember the year now.

[01:21:07] **HOWARD:** Should have been something around 1930 if you were 16, right?

[01:21:12] **BILL:** Earlier than that, twenty-something. '29, '28 . . . Anyhow . . .

[01:21:20] **HOWARD:** And the ILA was still there, is that correct?

[01:21:26] **BILL:** The ILA paid no attention. They wasn't too interested in this type of work. We used to call this "shenangoing", barge work and stuff like that. Well, the ILA didn't say, "Guys, join the union." There was other little businesses going on all the time where some pug-ugly son of a bitch would come down and say, "Hey, you hear about Flynn's birthday? He's having a birthday next week. Now everybody better kick in." He had no birthday. There was a birthday every month. Or, "Flynn's uncle is sick in Ireland," "Flynn's cousin's sick in Albany. We got to send him something. Everybody kick in 25¢."

[01:22:03] **HOWARD:** Did everybody kick in?

[01:22:04] **BILL:** Well, everybody did but I didn't kick in. Screw that. I knew the guy was a fake. He lived in the house, and he wasn't going to get by with. But, anyway, I think I took home with \$21 and some cents a

week. I'm only guessing now: \$21.49, and I got the \$1.49. My mother took the \$20. Well, all you needed at lunchtime was a nickel for a hot dog. The pushcart came around. I don't know if you ever had a nickel hot dog in your life in New York City where you got not only a hot dog, but you got a pound of sauerkraut to go with it. It was good, so you have two of them, and a drink or something. And you had your lunch. You go back into work and work until 5:30. So you worked a 9-hour day, half a day on a Saturday. I think the reason why I got out of that job was not so much because of the job, because so much as the problems at home. Happened with the stepfather and mother. I thought, screw the whole business, and got the hell out of that picture. That's why I got out of that job.

[01:23:06] **HOWARD:** What was your gang like? Did you work steadily in one gang?

[01:23:09] **BILL:** You worked with groups of guys. There'd be new guys maybe every day, stuff like that. But my guys were good guys.

[01:23:16] **HOWARD:** Mostly Irish?

[01:23:22] **BILL:** Not too much, mostly Irish. I'm trying to think if the clerk was Irish—which was a good job, all paperwork. It was a mixture on the dock. But mostly guys that Flynn knew. Guys that, when he wanted hard work, they produced, and they knew their job. They knew what the hell they were doing on the pier. Their first step into the pier was a working step. No free time. As soon as they went into the pier, bang! They went right to the gate. Up go the big doors, right off the bat. Without even taking off their coat! That type of department. That's the type of men you want on the job, according to Flynn. Guys that produce, producers.

So, that's how I got interested at that stage of the game in that part of the business. Then I worked longshoring on the passenger ships when they used to come in and take on stores and make these little cruises to the Bahamas. They would take on a tremendous amount of stores. God!

[01:24:39] **HOWARD:** Tremendous amount of what? I'm sorry.

[01:24:40] **BILL:** Stores, extra stores because they're going to take on now 500 additional passengers. Because they're making these big cruises to the Bahamas. Everybody's going down there to have a Roman holiday. Eat until you go out of your mind, and whatnot in them days. So we'd take on tons of food, load barrels of beer, wine, all types of stuff. So that was additional work. You would only maybe get two nights a week out of it.

[01:25:06] **HOWARD:** When was this? What year?

[01:25:07] **BILL:** This was in the early—as I recall, around '29 or '30.

[01:25:15] **HOWARD:** Do you remember the men ever talking about the ILA at that time? Or their views of unionism, or anything at all like what was discussed on the job?

[01:25:22] **BILL:** No, no. They never talked the ILA in that place where I was in. I never hear them talk about the ILA. In fact, there's very little talk about the ILA on the East Coast. Most of the longshoremen, I don't think they were even interested in the union. They were just interested in the job. I cannot say that they were strong advocates for the union. They just knew what the score was within the union, that sometimes it's best to keep your mouth shut as long as you got a job.

[01:25:57] **HOWARD:** Why do you think they had that view?

[01:25:59] **BILL:** Because they had seen. When you see a pistol local—you know, the old pistol local, guy comes out, bangs his .38 down to open up the meeting. They see the left-wingers coming out there with a soapbox trying to say, “Hey, fellow workers, time to get organized!” A bunch of gangsters go out and beat the Christ out of them, and they stand there watching this. Then the gangsters walk back there. “Any son of a bitch starts chanting against Joe Ryan, man, we’ll give it to them!” Then they had one outfit, like the banana dock. When I was in reform school as a kid, New York reform school, I got out, and I went to the parole officer. He said, “Now, look, I don’t want to have to send you back here again now. You got a year and a half to do on parole. I want to see you every couple of weeks. I recommend you get a job.” “Where am I gonna get a job?” He said, “Well, I’ll tell you what. I’ll give you a note, and I want you to go and see somebody, Sam Tully at the banana dock.” I was about as interested in working bananas as, you know—I took the note because I had to. “Well, I can’t promise you you’ll get a job, but, anyways, take it down there.” I get down to the banana docks, whatever it was Pier 3, 4, 5 on the West Side. They was the best looking docks down there. God, then I see this pug-ugly son of a bitch. You talk about a gangster; he typified it right down to the shoes. “What class are you from? You from the big house?” “No, I’m from reform.” “Reform school?! Is that where? You ain’t shoved anybody up, you ain’t shivved anybody?” “No, man, I—” “What’d you get in here for?” “Stealing junk. Brass fittings and—” “Brass fittings? We got a penny in the asshole here.” That type of attitude. “Well, I don’t know if there’ll be a boat in here next week. Come down here; see what happens. Can’t promise you anything. We’re trying to hold these jobs open for guys from the big house.”

Now, what they done was all the parole officers used to send their parolees down to Joe Ryan for jobs. He would get them in there. He would work the hell out of them. If they didn’t work and didn’t produce the way he wanted them to, there was always that thought that he may put the word back to the parole officer, and they’d go pick him up. Or find some reason to harass them.

[01:28:21] **HOWARD:** How early was that happening?

[01:28:22] **BILL:** It happened quite a bit. That’s why on the banana dock, which no longshoreman wanted to work there because it was miserable work. Bananas all the time. Even here when we had it, it was brutal. Joe Ryan’s mob would pick the toughest guys out of the gang that used to come down all the time to work bananas. He’d say, “Hey, I got something good for you. You don’t have to work bananas anymore. I’m gonna make some sort of delegate out of you. We got the goddamn communist trying to move in here, come on. Just show a left and a right at these son-of-a-bitches.” Once you did that, you’re now a prostitute. But you’re better taken care of. You don’t work bananas, only the fools working bananas now. Now, if you’re not going to go punch a few communists around, you’re certainly going to go punch a few of your longshoremen around if they get questionable, nasty.

So these are the conditions that longshoremen seen. And they shut up. They just said, “I got a job, man, I got a job. I’m trying to keep a family going.” Most working men had kids. With nothing upstairs, every time you take your pants off, if you’re Irish, you had a baby. You’re a Catholic, can’t practice birth control unless you got the ok of the Pope or somebody else. Here, the more kids you had to feed, the more you had to get on the hustle.

[01:29:38] **HOWARD:** Are you Catholic?

[01:29:39] **BILL:** Well, I had been a Catholic. Raised as a Catholic.

[01:29:41] **HOWARD:** Irish?

[01:29:41] **BILL:** No, nah, I haven’t been to church in ages. The only time I go to church is if some poor son of a bitch dies, and I just go there to say hello to the family.



But these are the conditions that we're talking about. Why men do what they do. Now I ask you, if you had a family with five kids, and you were from Italy and you're waiting for your first papers—would you start to give the boss or these gangsters hell for bad conditions?

[01:30:08] **HOWARD:** You did.

[01:30:09] **BILL:** That's different! I'm a native, number one, and I had seen these type of injustices taking place. I just couldn't take it. You have to scream out once in a while and take your chances. You might get knocked around, punched around, stomped on, broken jaw, broken nose—all these type of things. But you do it. But primarily you do it because now you're a member of a class. You recognize that. If you're going to make changes in this world, you have to stick your neck out and get it either chopped off. Or some son of a bitch is going to wait and pull your neck out when he's ready to chop it off.

[01:30:41] **HOWARD:** That's precisely the point. The question is, why does a guy like you become class conscious?

[01:30:45] **BILL:** I don't know. Why does it? Why does anybody become class conscious? It's not just necessarily me, right?

[01:30:52] **HOWARD:** Sure.

[01:30:53] **BILL:** Why does anybody do it? I think it's because you see something happening. I'm only guessing at this; I'm just going out loud. You see something happening, and you have to say to yourself, "We have to do something about it." But then there's the question, how do we go about it? And then something else falls into line. There is something. I guess a bunch of circumstances, all these things happening. It's like being—

[END PART THREE/BEGIN PART FOUR]

—he can't swim, and he's drowning. You're going to think things out, and you're going to go, "Well, I can swim, and I may get drowned. I don't like cold water. I don't like saltwater." This and that. Guy's going to drown. But if all of a sudden, bang! You jump in, without any thought of your own safety, and you manage to pull the son of a bitch out. That is a type of heroism. Not the guy that thinks things out because, if he thinks things out, he doesn't do it. He has to do it on an impulse. You have to do something on an impulse because it's the right thing to do. And the right thing in this case—try to save the guy. If you make it, you make it. If you don't make it, you'll never know about it.

[01:32:08] **HOWARD:** Ok, well, I think that pretty much covers the earlier period with the Marine Workers. Can you just sort of carry me through chronologically what you were doing in the early-thirties? I know you went to Spain later.

[01:32:19] **BILL:** Ok, I had made a trip out to San Francisco in a boxcar from port to port. I had stowed away in a ship in New York and ended up in Florida. In fact, I was on my way to Florida to try to get an oil tanker out of Tampa [Florida] with the other guy. Stowed away in a ship which, unfortunately, had a skipper who hated stowaways. Hated me particularly. When we got to Tampa, he had us all locked up. There was something like 10 other stowaways on the ship. We all ended up in a chain gang in Jacksonville, Florida for 30 days.

[01:32:52] **HOWARD:** What year was this?

[01:32:59] **BILL:** 'Twenty-eight maybe. I'm very poor on dates, I'm sorry.

[01:33:04] **HOWARD:** So am I.

[01:33:04] **BILL:** Sorry about that. But, anyhow, so I said the hell with it. From then on, after I got out from the chain gang, nothing but boxcars. You learn the ropes of the road, how to hide, how to do this, how to get the right car, how to get by, bumming doors, bumming, doing this and that. All the way to San Francisco. Then, after staying here for four or five months, trying to get a ship, at the same working, learning how to go from house to house, and getting aboard the ferry over to Berkeley, going to Oakland, over to the rich houses and knocking on doors. Doing handy work, being fed, being given clothes. I ended up with three or four suits, ended up with about \$20 in the bank, and so forth. So I considered myself fairly rich at the time, working every day and being fed by people. Ok. I decided I'd had it, the hell with it [going] back East. Grabbed a boxcar and headed back East. When I got back, then what'd I do? Fortunately, I got a job going to South America. After that trip, I got a job doing what? A Morgan Line ship going to New Orleans. Then into London, this and that. So my whole period that time was on ships. How to hit them better, how to understand them better, got better orientated, so on.

Then I was now coming into a much more class conscious stage, around 1935. Made a trip to the Mediterranean during the Ethiopian War, '35 [Second Italo-Ethiopian War, also referred to as Second Italo-Abyssinian War] . Watched Mussolini sending his troops across the pond to Ethiopia. Watched the reaction of the Italian people, more so the soldiers, the conscripts. Especially when some savage is out there with a feathered hat trying to get these guys to holler "Viva!" as the ship pulls away. Nobody wanted to holler "Viva!" They all know they're going to die over there out in the desert someplace. They're standing right next to our ship. It was sad, watching this whole business. As much as they holler, "Come on, you guys! Holler 'Viva!'," they just didn't want to do it. Anyhow, the ship pulled away and two ships headed for Ethiopia.

Coming back, seeing Germany, Hitler grabbing countries and shuttling this and shuttling that, working on the Jews and stomping on them, kicking them around. Nothing seemed to be being done in the United States. We seemed to be acquiescing everything, proclaiming the son of a bitch instead of taking a forceful stand. We just sat there and helped him get more armed, and build pocket battleships, and do everything else. Everybody cowered while he's stomping on the Jewish people over there. That was, it was a little too much. Be as it may, then the [SS] Bremen came along, pulling the flag off the Bremen and going to jail. Getting expelled—

[01:36:32] **HOWARD:** Explain the Bremen situation to me, would you?

[01:36:34] **BILL:** Alright, I'll be as brief on it as possible because of time. Anyway, what's happening in Germany is pogroms just taking place daily against the Jews. One law being they couldn't use the swimming pools no more. A couple days later, they can't use the beaches. These are laws. You're dealing with hundreds of thousands of people. Then came the question of the Catholics, telling the Catholics they couldn't—they have an episcopal letter which is generally read in churches on Sundays. [Joseph] Goebbels telling these churches, "We'll read you the letter. We'll tell you what to tell the flock." Now it's a question, not only is he against the trade unions—wiped them out; the communists—wiped them out, he's now going to wipe out the Jews. He's now also attacking the Catholics because the Catholics are saying, "Hey, man, we have a right. We're reading the letter right from the Pope. You don't tell us what to do. We have a higher Father than you. We have a Pope." He goes and says, "I'm the Pope, better than the Pope." This type of business. So now he's getting ready to wipe out the Catholic opposition.

But, anyway, that's taking place. Plus, the fact that one of our guys, a guy by the name of Lawrence Simpson, was taken off the SS Manhattan in Hamburg and beat up by a couple of storm troopers. SS [Schutzstaffel] men. His locker broke into, some literature was confiscated. He was in the underground, supplying some harbor workers over there with literature that was made in the United States, anti-fascist literature. He was a little lax in

security. The ship was full of Gestapo people, full of German agents, which travelled between New York and Hamburg. They put the finger on him, and it was a set up. So he ended up in jail. So we decided that between all the combination of things—the anti-Semitic business, and Hitler’s fascism in general, and Lawrence Simpson, the Catholic issue—that it was time now to do something to wake this goddamn United States up. Or wake New York up primarily to what was taking place. Protest.

So the party organized the Bremen. The object there was to get aboard the ship on sailing nights. The Bremen was the flagship of the North German Lloyd [Norddeutscher Lloyd] . Two ships, the Bremen and the [SS] Europa. Beautiful ships, fast, sleek, so on. They were the pride of the North German Lloyd and consequently of all north Germany. On the bow of the ship, they had the swastika. It was lit up at night by a big beacon light on the bridge which shined right down on the bow and kept on all night. Almost any place in New York, if you got up on a roof, you could look out and see the big powerful searchlight lighting up the swastika. It was a brazen flag in the first place.

We decided that there was going to be a big demonstration. Leaflets were put out all over New York City to get down to the Bremen that particularly night, sailing night, to demonstrate. There’ll be a big open meeting there that night. So the literature was put out every single day the whole week. It gathered thousands of people; 10,000, 12,000, 13,000 people, maybe more, gathered at the pier. Our job as seamen was to get aboard the ship dressed as passengers or dressed as people, cleaned up, and try to get that flag somehow. Rip it down or tear it down, take it ashore, throw gasoline on it, and burn the son of a bitch. To get it off the ship.

Unfortunately, all these plans didn’t work out that way. Now, the Bremen, where it was docked, was an open pier. That is, you could stand on the street and look up and see the whole bloody ship, the whole length of it, and see what was going on aboard there from the point of view of just looking up. The flag was evident. So, the meeting started about 7 or 8 o’clock at night. It went on, and all of a sudden the 20-minute whistle blew to all non-passengers to get the hell off the ship. So we knew we had to make a break for it. It looked very difficult. All the plans had been made by other people that didn’t know anything about a ship. Really bad plans. They didn’t take into consideration the Bremen had five-foot sea breakers, six of them all along the port deck, which were like big steel hurdles you had to jump over to get over. That the crew’s quarters were up forward, crew members all hanging around the area where you’d have to get to past them to get to the flag. That the flag was higher up, six-eight feet higher up off the main deck and you’d have to climb a ladder. Anybody could pull you off a ladder. All these things nobody had planned on. Plus, the fact that there was a gangway mid-ship, and they would not allow anybody to go past the gangway.

So when we got aboard, we had to make our own plan. In order to get the flag, we had to make our own plan. And, on top of that, we were hounded by members of the Red Squad who knew that something was going to take place, but they didn’t know what. They knew because they had trailed certain members that they knew, and they had got aboard the ship. They kept on wondering what the hell are these guys doing aboard the ship. They had no idea it was going to be about the flag. They just thought they was going to go aboard and harangue everybody on the ship. But, all of a sudden, after the 20-minute whistle blew, we had made up a plan that we would have to fight our way up. Sure enough, when we started to head for the gangway, “Everybody head for the gangway to go ashore,” we headed for the gangway. But when we got there, we made an effort to get past that to go forward. One officer grabbed one guy, the first guy, a guy called “Low-Life” McCormick, a good guy. He turned around and belted the officer. That started! Now they’re looking up at the bridge, all the gold braid up there watching the commotion, looking down at the gangway. This officer went back on his ass. Immediately they’re screaming words from the bridge about “What’s going on down there? Get more people over here. Something is happening!” Some sailors ran up.

In the meantime, our guys now stepped over this officer. We're now running our way up to get up to the bow. Now, I'm the fourth guy. McCormick got maybe six more feet passed this officer when two crew members turned around by orders of the skipper and grabbed him. They're trying to hold him at bay, but now the next echelon is running up. So the guy, Paddy Gavin, killed in the Battle of the Bulge later, he grabbed a couple of crewmen and belted them around before they grabbed him and jumped on him. Then the next guy up was Blair, and he's now another 20 feet up the deck, maybe 30 feet. Before he engaged a couple of sailors who come running out. While he's holding two of them at bay, shaking them and they're shaking him, he's hollering to me, I'm the next in line, "Keep going! Keep going!"

So, it just happened to be that we ran out of sailors at this stage of the game. Otherwise we would have never got there. So, I got to the bow, got up and climbed up real fast. Now the masses, 15,000 people or whatever, they could now see what was happening. They could see you. They see me pull the flag and rip the son of a bitch. Ripping it! Now they're screaming on the bridge, going mad, because now they see what the objective is. They didn't know what the hell it was before. They had no idea that we were heading for the flag. So the bridge now sees the flag being ripped down, and the people on the dock see what's happened. They're ecstatically mad, screaming with delight, while the skipper and all the brass are screaming with hatred and so on, giving out orders over the loudspeaker. Ball crew, every member, bring out security squad, this and that. The German language just screamed out. So consequently, all the passengers are going stir-nuts. It stopped everything. All the fascists' conversion, afraid to move, they didn't know what the hell was going on. People running ashore—that all stopped. Now cops come running up.

In the meantime, I got one of the halyards pulled. Quite a big size [inaudible] \_\_\_\_\_. I got one piece ripped off completely. Now I'm trying to rip the other son of a bitch, and it won't give. I had a razor blade in my pocket, which I had for that purpose. It was a gem, with a little piece of cardboard. I had practiced everything out so perfect. In the hand it would go with the razor blade picked out, one flip off the finger, the thumb would push the paper off, ready to cut. I put my hand in my pocket three times, and the goddamn paper had come off in the pocket. Every time I put my hand I could feel the razor blade stick into the finger. Now you're working in panic. You just can't work because what you think—what is only one sixtieth of a second or fiftieth of a second, you think it's an hour. Everything is out of proportion. So, three times I did that, and all I did was cut all the fingers. They were all bleeding like a son of a bitch. In the meantime, I knew I only had seconds to remain on the forepeak before somebody was either going to punch me off, and they had no gate, no wire, no nothing. I had to go one place, overboard, or fall back onto the deck. The logical place I would have fell right over the side. Right into the drink. Here I am in panic. Son of a bitch, only a second, get off! Yanking, and it won't go off. Then I turned around and noticed a big hand coming up. Oh god! So close to victory and now it's lost. I'm just getting ready to step on the hand, and the guy happened to be a friend of mine, guy by the name of Adrian Duffy. He was sent, and he turned around, "Hold that son of a bitch still till I get the knife on it!" All of a sudden I heard a click, click, and outcome the knife with the switchblade. I held it, and he went clunk! And broke the last piece. I threw it into the air, and it fluttered down into the Hudson River. Man, the crowd was so, oh god, never heard anything like it.

But I paid no attention because you wasn't going to stand there after all that business. Now these guys are beating people to death here. I heard a shot go out; a guy got shot. One of our guys got shot, a bullet in the groin. So you can't stand and take bows. For what? Besides it's bullshit. So, anyhow, I jumped down. My friends were laid out unconscious. Well, if this is the way we got to go, this is the way it is. We did our job, so that's it. Sure enough, as soon as I hit the deck, man, bang! The Germans were punching me around, and I was punching them. I got maybe halfway down between the bow and the gangway, and I seen [sic] a stream of cops now coming aboard. Christ, they were coming aboard in groups of 20, running up the gang. All of a sudden, I remember, bang! I got hit, fell down; a pair of shoes hit me in the groin, I mean in the solar plexus. Wiped all the air out of me. I turned around; a foot hit me in the head. Started to get dizzy. Another foot hit me in the

head. The next thing I remember was somebody picking me up, trying to shake me, “Come on, we got you now. Let’s get ashore. Let’s get out of here.” And then, “Open up, now, open up!” They’re trying to get all these passengers standing there in horror. I heard some women, last remark, “Why, they’re only college boys!” That pissed me off more than anything! You know? Frankly, I’m some son of a bitch who never went to school. I wanted to say, “You son of a bitch! I never went past the fifth grade!”

But, be as it may, then they take you ashore. Now you know, you have to understand New York cops. I mean, they’re the most brutal bastards in the world. So you know all this is in store for you. To walk out, and the cop has got you, and he takes you into a little booth. There’s a guy laying there, massive blood, laying out there. All you can see is his eyes, the glossy eyes. The cop says, “This is him, huh?” [mimes slurring of the beaten man] “I dunno.” Jesus Christ, and I still didn’t know who the guy was. I figured he must be a passenger. The cop dragged me out, typical New York cop style, walked me around 20 feet in a circle, and took me right back in. “Ok, then, this must be him, huh?” He [beaten man] looks up. “No.” The theory of the New York cops: get anybody, as long as you get a guy. “Won’t you say, ‘Yes, that’s him,’? Then we’ll pin the rest of the tag on him later.” But, anyhow, then the cop finally got frustrated. “Get in here! Sit down over there, and shut up.”

I found out later that this guy was a detective. He was a member of the Red Squad. And the name was Solomon; he was a Jewish detective who delighted in being a Red Squad member. He had followed one of the other guys, left-wingers, a party member, up from some place because he recognized him as a party member. “I think I’ll follow this son of a bitch.” So he followed him, and he followed him aboard the ship. But he didn’t know what the plan was, that we were going to take the flag. This guy, name was [?Drollette?], was going up to the bow from the starboard side. Unbeknownst to us, he had a pair of brass knuckles. Every one of us had a weapon of some kind, a fountain pen, an old spike—we had some piece of odds and ends. Not obvious weapon, but something just to, you know, if you’re going to get down really bad, you might as well take some son of a bitch with you. One guy is better than nobody. So he had a pair of brass knuckles. Had we known that, we would have said, “Hey, dump them son of a bitches. It’s as bad as carrying a gun or a long shiv or something. We didn’t come here to murder people. We just come here to get a flag.”

Anyhow, he had the brass knuckles, which was the obvious guy to Red Squad guy. When he started to starboard side, the Red Squad guy followed him. He got halfway up the deck, and he turned around. He said, “You! You communist!” So our guy turned around, and, when he turned around, he had the brass knuckles on. The detective seen it; he got shocked. Took out a gun, and he, pow! He got one bullet off and hit him in the groin. So our guy fell, and [?Drollette?] fell. The only thing was, he didn’t have the brains to get rid of the brass knuckles. When he picked him up, he still had them on. So that was like a felony or whatever it was against him. It was higher, assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, and so on.

But, when he fired the shot, that attracted a lot of crew members. They thought that he was a communist. So they come after him and start punching the Christ out of him. They took the gun away from him and threw him overboard. Then, right away, he took his badge out, and he said, “I’m a policeman.” The crew took the badge off, ripped the badge off, and threw that overboard, then hit him a few times. Got him on the ground, and stomped on him, kicked him in the face some, merciless. So they did all the damage because, like I said, they thought he was a demonstrator.

So here we are, the six of us. We all went to jail, and we’re eventually bailed out in a couple of days. Demonstration went on. The court case went on for months, for weeks and weeks and weeks. Finally, we were let out. The judge, when he vindicated us, he vindicated us on the basis of—I think it was Judge [?Bobsky?]  
—he said, “In the eyes of these men, who did what they did, to them, the swastika represented a pirate ship. The skull and crossbones on a pirate ship. Sneaking into a peaceful harbor after it had sunk a ship of mercy, or a ship

of state. Therefore”—now his speech was a long one, but I’m only summarizing—“therefore, these men was justified, and I dismiss them all.” So he dismissed it. Like I said, we had a long case.

Right after that, then—I was in the SIU—I mean the ISU at that time—that’s when they called me down to the union and expelled me.

[01:53:21] **HOWARD:** That was what, ‘36 or something?

[01:53:22] **BILL:** That was now ‘35.

[01:53:23] **HOWARD:** After that—

[01:53:25] **BILL:** Then I went to the West Coast.

[01:53:28] **HOWARD:** Oh, I see, ok.

[01:53:31] **BILL:** I got on the ship, after they expelled me. I kept my old book, and I went aboard a West Coast ship. West Coast ships, whenever they came in from the West Coast, they were a member of the ISU, but they were from the West Coast division. They try to hire West Coast men only who were on the beach here. They were good guys, all good union men, the strike had been over. So they understand the whole question of class consciousness to some degree, of solidarity, and whatnot. So the conditions are better and whatnot. Ok, so I went on a ship called the Alaskan. I got job as a wiper, and I went around to the West Coast. When I got around to the West Coast, I went to see a guy by the name of Earl King, who was secretary of the firemen’s union. Says, “I know all about it, Bailey. I read it in the paper, the journal they put out, The Seamen’s Journal. That you got expelled. It’s a pleasure. Go past the committee here; we’ll give you a book.” He took out the book from a drawer that they gave me; it was quite a deal. He said, “I’m glad they expelled you because we could use your right here. We need your type around here to get some work. We’re preparing for a big strike in ‘36, ‘37.”

So I sailed back to the East Coast, and I got off the ship and went back doing rank and file work among the sailors back there, among the seamen. They sent me to Baltimore, stayed down there. That’s where I got my jaw broke. I worked—

[01:55:07] **HOWARD:** Who’s the “they” that sent you?

[01:55:08] **BILL:** The Party.

[01:55:10] **HOWARD:** Were you in the Party at this time?

[01:55:11] **BILL:** Oh, yeah, I’d been in the Party, hell, way before the Bremen.

Stayed in Baltimore, got my jaw broke. We tried to participate in the early spring strike. We had something going, one or two ships, but that fizzled out. They got scabs. But we put out a newspaper, put out The Pilot. Got something going all the time, kept up the awareness, the consciousness of the Baltimore seamen. Then I went back to New York after about six months. I decided to head west. I got aboard another ship. In the strike headquarters, a ship had come in, the President Garfield, and they had called the Seamen’s Defense Committee. By that time, we had the Seamen’s Defense Committee. The spring strike was busted, fell apart, but they decided to keep the Defense Committee going.

[01:56:12] **HOWARD:** That was the nucleus of the NMU [National Maritime Union] .

[01:56:13] **BILL:** That's right. That's exactly right. So they kept that going. A phone call came in, "Hey, we need a fireman, an oiler, for the President Garfield. Any West Coast men around here?" "Yeah." "Ok, there's a job for you." I went aboard and went back to the West Coast. Sailed back to San Francisco. I got off, became editor of a newspaper called the Black Gang News at the time, that the union was putting out.

[01:56:35] **HOWARD:** What was it called?

[01:56:36] **BILL:** Black Gang News, meaning representing the firemen down below, or representing the engine guys. It was a rank and file newspaper, all militant stuff. We now had the condition—the union had conditioned everybody else to prepare for a strike. That's why it came out successful, because we had done so much conditioning. Finally, sure enough, the '36 strike fell right into place. The officials expected it. The ship owners' intention was to lock everybody out, destroy everybody, and demoralize the union. In fact, they had even arrested Earl King at the time. King ran the gang with the jail. We got together, and we put a new guy in: John Ferguson, who we thought was a good guy. He turned out to be some sort of a dud. But my relationship with him was always good. We sort of liked each other and was honest with each other. He had bad hang ups. One was booze, two was racehorses, and three was gals. He loved all three in whatever proportion or whatever fashion.

He eventually ended up playing around in [Harry] Lundeberg's camp. Lundeberg was very hostile, started to get hostile at that time. Both Lundeberg and [V.J.] Malone tried to sell out the longshoremen by trying to manipulate contracts and a back-to-work movement against longshoremen. Seamen wouldn't go for it. The united front was so positively strong, so powerful, that even the Lundeberg union, they voted it down. Lundeberg and Malone went back to Washington to testify for something. All of a sudden we get a phone call from him saying we better settle up because, if we don't settle up within two or three days, the congressmen here that he had talked to said that they were going to rush to a bill to do this and do that, wipe out the union and so forth. So we sent him a polite "you get your ass back here, or you won't have a job when you come back." Stuff like that.

[01:59:01] **HOWARD:** I thought Lundeberg signed the agreement in '36—

[01:59:04] **BILL:** He did!

[01:59:04] **HOWARD:** Before the longshoremen, right?

[01:59:06] **BILL:** Yeah, that was what—he tried to negotiate the contract away. The point of the whole strike was we come out together, we go back together. And we do not go back until everybody has a contract that's faithful to what they want. But we don't want any wishy-washy type of stuff. No pressure or sneaking in and signing contracts where everybody don't know what's happening, and saying, "We got ours and, goddamn it, you guys need to get a contract. Or we're going to go back!" Or something along that side. This type of maneuvering, which nobody liked. Even the sailors didn't like it when they used it against Lundeberg. It ended up after 100-something days that the ship owners couldn't put us back to the pre-'34 conditions. So, ok, they had it.

[01:59:54] **HOWARD:** Do you remember talking to any longshoremen during the '36-'37 strike?

[01:59:58] **BILL:** Oh, I was with them all the time. I was on a strike committee with them, yeah. We're talking about the West Coast now? Oh yeah.

[02:00:03] **HOWARD:** What were their feelings? What did they talk about?

[02:00:05] **BILL:** Oh, 100 percent. “We’re gonna win this strike. No son of a bitch is gonna—if they think they’re gonna get us back to the shape-up days, they’re crazy. We’ll take them son-of-a-bitches on.” They were just perfect. Really. And, in fact, everybody was. All the seamen the same way.

I was on both the strike committees. I was on the firemen’s strike committee, then the joint strike committee. The joint strike committee was a powerhouse. It was a powerhouse of brains, and most of it came from longshoremen, the longshore leadership and Henry Schmidt, a guy who later got kicked out. Well, the FBI or Immigration had something on him. Henry Shrimp. Absolutely a genius! Guy by the name of John Shoemaker—a genius! At that period. Later, somewhere along the line, got manipulated here and manipulated there. Sleeping in the wrong bed with the wrong gal. Doing some goddamn thing. Sneaking into the country or whatever it was. They ended up testifying against [Harry] Bridges on this and that. But when I had been working, these men were masses. They were, oh, really, to see these men operate was something worthwhile just living through life for if nothing else happened.

[END PART FOUR/BEGIN PART FIVE]

[02:01:36] **HOWARD:** Then when did you go to Spain?

[02:01:38] **BILL:** Well, I went to Honolulu [Hawai’i]. The party sent me to Honolulu after Spain, after the ‘36-’37 strike, to do some work there. You know, there was no organization going there at all. So I went to the island, stayed six months, helped start forming some party groups. Which helped in the end to start the ILWU [International Longshore and Warehouse Union] Local 142 over there.

[02:02:02] **HOWARD:** So you worked among longshoremen then?

[02:02:04] **BILL:** I worked with anybody that was there. There were longshoremen, there were seamen, there were sugar workers. Anybody that would listen to me or that needed, that came to me and said, “Can you help us do this? Help us do that?” As long as it was in the sense of doing something for the class, that was my job, I felt. So, that’s what I did. I worked among longshoremen, had meetings, secret meetings in the house. In my room. We’d sit down and discuss how to go about building unions. You would keep your eye open for this guy on the dock, and if he showed signs of being militant in a sense, makes a remark against the boss or against a ship owner, visit him. Get him to visit you in the house. Introduce him to the next guy. That’s the way it’s one and then the other. You got two, and next time you got five. Everybody out there is a contact now; next thing, you have 15 men meeting. So, we got this group now. It’s large; it’s growing bigger every week. More guys are coming in, and we’re constantly talking. Pretty soon the guys now trust you, and they’re opening up, saying, “Who else can we contact?” Guys start making names up, and pretty soon we have a movement going.

But then the sugar workers came in. I worked with a guy by the name of [?Figuel?] . He tried to start up a sugar workers group. He was a Filipino himself. Much of the sugar workers in the islands are Filipinos. He invited me to go on a tour with him to Maui [Hawai’i] . He would pay the expenses on the overnight boat, overnight steamer, and pay meals, whatever it was, while I was there. I got no money for it, but you just did it. My job was to go with him to speak to the groups of sugar workers outside the plantations. We’d come out the main gate, and we’d set up a soapbox and harangue them, talk to them about what it means to build up a union and get something going. Being a seaman who just came from a west coast strike and a member of a union, that was great impetus. Being an ex-member of the strike committee, all that stuff. So when he announced me in the Philippines language, Tagalog, he put all this glory on, this great guy who won this and won that. So all the Filipinos figured, well, this guy must have something on the ball. So what I said, they would listen to. How important it is, that you got to fight the oppressor, sugar is needed in this world and there’s tons of it here, you’re the guys producing it, and, goddamn it, you got to right to a certain percentage of this and that. So these



things were common things that made sense, and so on. The guys said yes, yes, yes. [?Figuel?] said, “Line up here, give me \$2,” or \$5, whatever it was—I paid no attention to that part because that wasn’t my job. My job was just agitating them. He took the names and the money.

Then, the next thing, I went back to Honolulu. Son of a bitch, I’m only there a week, and I get a message from [?Figuel?] , “Meet me at the steamer to come back. We have a strike over there in Maui. The guys walked out from the sugar plantation, number one, and, number two, all things are breaking loose. You better come help.” I go back to Maui. The strike is going on now; these guys just got frustrated and decided that it was time to go. They walked out. It’s like working in a bread shop. If you’re going to take on the boss, you don’t take him after everything’s come out of the oven. You take him on when the dough is already laying there on the goddamn table swelling up. Then you say, “Hey, man, we’re gonna fold up right now or you pay us.” Or whatever. You take him on. Sugar cane’s the same way. You have to wait until everything’s ready to be cut because, if it isn’t cut, something will go rotten. Sugar will be destroyed. That’s when you take him on. It’s your time.

Here, in this particular case, the sugar is still in the process of growing up. I guess they had about another month to go before they burn it, then harvest it. They could have waited, but they didn’t. They could have waited another month. But they didn’t. Ok, now the job is what? To try to rescue something here, keep the guys together. Not sense telling them to sneak back to work while we agitate the rest of the plantation. But make the best of a bum situation. While we’re making the best of a bum situation, we had the first May Day parade in the history of the Hawai’ian Islands. Normally May Day is Lei Day in Hawai’i. So I said, “Screw this May Day and Lei Day stuff. Let’s have a demonstration!”

So we organized the May Day demonstration with big placards. “The mules get an hour for lunch. The workers get a half hour. The mule’s allowed to have their lunch in the shade. We have to eat ours in the sun. If you don’t like us, if you don’t want to pay us our wages, send us back to the Philippines.” Well, the Filipinos didn’t like that, but I said, “You gotta be defiant! Put your best foot forward.” And they were all sorts of these class conscious slogans that I could think of. But they loved the parade. We marched, I think, six goddamn miles in the boiling sun from Lahaina [Hawai’ian] to Wailuku [Hawai’ian] . It was brutal! But it was a march, and they were absolutely ecstatic. We ended up in a great, big ball park. That was the first May Day parade in the history of the Hawai’ian islands.

[02:08:04] **HOWARD:** How many people were in it? Do you have any idea?

[02:08:06] **BILL:** I had a picture of it, and I can’t find it. Goddamn, son of a bitch. I got one or two. Oh, no, they took the pictures out with them. I don’t know, maybe 1,000.

After that, then a negotiator came over from the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] , and he got a hold of me. He said, “Look, I talked to the employers and that’s the best we can do. I think they want to give you two cents or three cents more an hour. You’ll be able to have shop delegates or union delegates or whatever you guys want to have. A representative inside the plantation.” So I go back to [?Figuel?] , and I tell him, “Man, grab it. For the first, now you’re legal! Now you can agitate, you can get the guys, line ‘em up. In six months or a year from now, you could have strikes on every goddamn island.” “No, no, we want more.” That was his attitude. Then the NLRB guy, which was a good guy, a really aggressive guy, told me, “Impossible. Can’t get nothing from these guys. That’s what you’re going to get. Either that, or you’re lost.” So anyhow, couldn’t move [?Figuel?] , so I said, “My usefulness here is over.” There was no more I could do. I said, “I want to go back to Honolulu. You’ve got everything wrapped up over here.”

I went back to Honolulu, and I wasn’t back there four or five days when I met a waterfront cop, halfway decent guy. He knew me, and he said, “Hey, Bailey”—oh, no! No, I read it in the paper. Went out and picked up the

Honolulu Bulletin one day. The headline says, “Alleged Labor Leader Faces 10-20 Years in Jail for CS.” [criminal syndicalism] So I said, ‘I wonder who the hell their alleged labor leader is? Who the hell are they talking about?’ Then I read down. It said, “District attorney’s office, right now there’s a stack of documents placed there by various members of the Hawai’ian sugar plantation. These are speeches made by alleged labor leader William Bailey.” [gasp] Son of a bitch! “These speeches, according to the attorney general, are seditious. They called on the sugar workers to revolt, to commit violence,” to do this and that. There was one case where I practically had to do it. “The attorney general said he will study these [speeches] sometime next week more in detail. If the charges are correct, Mr. Bailey may face this.”

One of the speeches I made at one plantation, it was just workers who came to listen to me speak. A bunch of lunas. The lunas are like the slave-driving son-of-a-bitches who ride up and down in the cane field on horses. “Come on, come on! No time to rest! Get up! Get a move on!” That type of shit. They’re hated. Well, they’re not loved, let’s put it that way. They got their eye on everybody. So they came down, and they’re standing in back of the big group of Filipinos that listen to my speech. I was getting no place haranguing them. I watched the reactions in the faces of the Filipinos, the workers. I says, I must be talking to dummies or something. What’s going on here? Then, in the back, the little heckling going on was the lunas. And I said, “Hey, hey, nah!”

Now it became a duel between me and them, with the prize being the rank-and-filers in the middle who’s watching me over them. They’re afraid to react because these guys at this stage of the game are lunas. I said, ok, got to find some way to shut these bastards up. So I said, “There’s all this heckling going on. I want to tell you a story.” All bullshit, of course. “Down in Mexico a few years ago, I was riding down in the sugar fields down there. I’m riding with some labor leader through this little town. I seen a bunch of people hanging up by their goddamn neck on the telephone pole. All the way through the town, maybe 20, 30 people. I said to this labor leader, ‘Who are them [sic] people hanging up on them trees?’ And the labor leader says, ‘Why those are the Mexican lunas who have been exploiting us for years and years and years. The best place for them sons of bitches is on the short end of a rope.’”

The Filipinos, the rank and file, went berserk. And all the lunas really turned around. While they’re moving—they had to go way up on a hill, a beautiful hill. They lived on the crest of the hill in nice shacks for them. Down below, the base of the hill got all the rain, everything and the poor workers. So, as long as I had them on the move, I said, “And furthermore, there may be a time come when the workers can no longer stand the oppression. When that day comes, these hills may run with the blood of these despotic bastards.” Well, that was too much. These guys took off.

Anyway, this is all down. Some son of a bitch is sitting not far away from me, taking all this down shorthand. Every place they went, they sent somebody around taking the stuff down. Now all these things have been typed up and now laid on the attorney general’s desk. So that piece was in the paper. A cop comes to me, a friendly cop. He says, “Bill, the [SS] Lurline comes back tomorrow.” That’s the one running back between San Francisco and Honolulu, passenger ship. He says, “If you’re not on that ship when she sails Saturday, they’re going to lower the boom on you.” Now once you’re in the islands, no lawyer’s going to stick his neck out to defend you. There’s no left-wing lawyers. There’s no ILD, International Labor Defense. You’re in once they get you on criminal syndicalism. You’re finished; they’ll bury you in the islands. So I went to my group and I told them, “It’s goring at me. I want to go to Spain in the worst way. Feel I’ve got to be there! These guys are going to hang me, but I don’t give a good god—I want your word. If you want me to stay here, fellas, I’ll stay here. But what do you think?”

They said, “Look, we know the pressures right now. We know this business, they mean business. Our advice is we have learned a lot from you already, how to organize. You gave us a lot of confidence, self-respect, etc., etc. Get on the Lurline.” We all shook hands, had a drink.

Sure enough, there was a job open. I got on the Lurline, went back to San Francisco. Within a week, ten days, I'm on my way to New York to go to Spain. I got my passport.

[02:15:03] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question before we get there. It actually goes back in time to the '36-'37 strike. There's a question I wanted to ask you. Do you remember whether the Communist Party recruited many people from the waterfront as a result of that strike?

[02:15:18] **BILL:** Oh yes. Yes, yes.

[02:15:20] **HOWARD:** Do you have any idea how many?

[02:15:22] **BILL:** I can't say. Because we were recruiting during the whole course of the strike. It lasted 100 and some days, didn't it? So the recruiting was going on that whole period of time. Since it was a very peaceful strike, not one bloody nose in the whole business. But it was so well organized. The Communists played a very prominent role in it because of the organizing ability. They did gather a great tribute from the rank-and-filers who looked at them self-sacrificing guys working their ass off all the time. Always out there doing this, hustling, and building a union, and so forth. So it was a fertile ground. Here you got a mad mess of men that you'd never come in contact with ordinarily or in such a short period of time. You got a soup kitchen feeding thousands every meal. You're in contact with so many men. So the recruiting of course became much easier. So many other social events that you could take a guy to. If you didn't take him to the Communist Party thing, you took him to other events. Dances that was going on all the time or lectures. It was quite a good feeling, and a mutual feeling. Maybe I recruited 10 guys during the whole strike. I was just one. We had a good deal working.

[02:16:52] **HOWARD:** Ok, so that brings us up to Spain. I'd like to move ahead if we can to the war period itself, World War II. Where were you during the war?

[02:17:03] **BILL:** When the war broke out, I was sitting in the theater in New York. I was waiting for the election results. We had an election going on in the Firemen's Union. I was running for New York port agent. We had a branch there in them days down at the end of Broad Street someplace. Anyhow I was sitting in a New York theater—I don't know if it was the Paramount or what—and bang! The lights went out, and the movie stopped. "All members of the Armed Services get the hell out of here, report to your bases. Pearl Harbor has just been attacked." Well, you know, really a shock. Then the next day I remember reading the election report that I had won. So now my job was to what? Supply the hundreds or thousands of ship that were coming out, get crews for them, put them aboard. Now we're really in business.

So I did this for about a year, the first part of that year. The ships that I had to contend with from New York were ones that were running to London or Murmansk [Russia], stuff like that. It wasn't an easy feeling to see a guy come back with no fingers or no toes who got torpedoed on a Murmansk run and laid out on a goddamn raft, floating around half frozen to death until somebody picked him up. Very sad to see these guys. It was very difficult for me to even sleep at night. I kept on thinking, can I take this? I can't sit out this war! It's impossible! I don't belong in a son of a bitch of a desk here while all these wonderful people are coming back shot up. It's better they sink me than go through the war like this. Anyhow, any time I'd make an effort to get the hell out, there'd be somebody to come along and say, "But you're needed here. Because you're at least interested in getting these ships filled with men, and getting them out. You know the responsibility." So that didn't work on me. After a year, I ran for re-election. I got it; I won it. I think I stayed one month, and I said, that's it. I've got to go to sea! Just can't live with myself.

Sure enough, I resigned the job. Somebody else took over, and I went out to the West Coast. Went to school for two weeks and became an engineer. Got my engineer's ticket and, sure enough, sailed. I sailed as an engineer all

during the war. When the war was over, gave up the engineering. Went back to electrician or something like that. Worked up until the Korean War. That's the time I got screened up.

[02:20:00] **HOWARD:** Ok, let me cover that in a bit more detail. One of the allegations, as you know, against the CP [Communist Party] during the war was that they pushed a strong class collaboration line. How do you respond to that?

[02:20:12] **BILL:** Class collaboration line in what way? With the American—

[02:20:15] **HOWARD:** With the American labor movement.

[02:20:16] **BILL:** I understand. Well, with the American government in that sense. There's an ideology that came up, an ideology that now we have a capitalist system, progressive—they differentiate capitalist systems. In this group, they're progressive; in that group is real arch reactionaries. That type of stuff. Therefore, the progressive group, you could live with them. Probably after a few cocktails or something, everybody starts talking about the great future that was in store for us. That workers' paradise, we're all going to sit around drinking cocktails. It's going to be easy, no more strikes. You don't have to strike. Everybody learned their lesson, made sacrifices. All this bullshit. [Earl] Browder came out with a book called *Tehran and After* [sic; conflation of *Victory and After* [1942] and *Tehran, Our Path in War and Peace* [1944], both by Browder], which I read the first few pages and threw it away. I couldn't take it because Karl Marx said we're in a 24-hour, 365-days-a-year class struggle.

[02:21:10] **HOWARD:** How did you implement that line in your union, though? Were you sort of dropping the work rules that you had won and things like that? For instance—

[02:21:18] **BILL:** No, no.

[02:21:19] **HOWARD:** Ok.

[02:21:20] **BILL:** Go ahead, finish that.

[02:21:20] **HOWARD:** Well, I was just going to say a number of unions dropped many of the work rules that they had won through years of struggle. They sort of backed off on being militant at the bargaining table. They were giving concessions. They accepted piece rates and things like that.

[02:21:34] **BILL:** That is probably true, but in the Firemen's Union this did not happen. This happened only in unions—you're right. It happened in the unions where it was completely dominated, both in leadership and ideology of the rank and file, by the left. But when you was in a union that had right-wingers, conservatives in the leadership, they wasn't about ready to believe all this bullshit. They wasn't about ready to drop all these conditions. They may have been satisfied to maybe—like, for instance, they agreed in Washington, when I was New York agent, they said, well, for the peace and harmony aboard ship, let us do away with the ship's delegates. And have no union meetings anymore. It won't be necessary because they'll only be a hindrance to the war effort. When the president of the union, Malone at the time, made a tour, we were very close friends. He got up in front of me, giving this report. He said, "I just come in from Washington; I'm giving this report." He patted me on the back a couple of times. "Bill, you're sure doing a good job here, fellas. Good man." Then he started talking about what he learned in Washington. "Yes, and I recommend we give up the ship's delegate business and having these union meetings for the war." Immediately, as soon as he sat down, I got up and said, "Forget it!"

[02:22:57] **HOWARD:** Was Malone a left-winger?

[02:22:58] **BILL:** No! He was the most conservative, FBI agent the son of a bitches ever had. He collaborated with the FBI, everything. He was 100 percent arch-right-winger. Made statements that he would never want to see the Communists take over the unions, and this and that. Anyhow, but this was the program that they were agreeing on, this class collaboration stuff.

[02:23:15] **HOWARD:** You told me earlier that the right-wingers were the ones who prevented that sort of collaboration in the unions.

[02:23:19] **BILL:** That's right, but, in this particular case, I'm just showing this one sample of what Malone came back with. Malone was sold a bill a goods by the admirals in Washington because that was the meeting. Some admirals and senators. They said we've got to get rid of all this. So, he came back. He figured this was a good deal. Now, for a guy like him, he thought that would be alright because the guys on the ship, the Communists, were doing all the agitating. They're the ones that call the meeting together. "Alright, fellas, let's have a meeting." And you talk about the war, agitate here, agitate there. When the ballots are handed out, guys ask the guy who's the best man to vote for. So meetings are ideal things. They're used as a force to keep people together. In this case, Malone thought it was not a bad idea to dump the meetings, to go along with the admirals. It meant being in their good grace; maybe we can get more conditions later on by being this way now. But I didn't see it that way. I got up, and, man, I denounced the whole thing. "I think it stinks. Today we give up the meeting. What do we give up tomorrow? What do we give up the next day? This is only Tuesday. By Sunday, we'll be giving up the union." So we ended up half-assed, a little bitter about the stage of the game. But we never did give up our meeting; we kept it.

[02:24:38] **HOWARD:** Were you in the party at that time?

[02:24:40] **BILL:** Oh, yeah, this is during the war, 1942 or something.

[02:24:43] **HOWARD:** Doesn't that go against the grain of the party's—

[02:24:46] **BILL:** That has nothing to do with me! I'm against a lot of grains in the party. I told you, I just read a book, *Tehran and After* [sic], Browder's book, I read the first few pages of the book and threw it away. I'm supposed to go out and sell 100 copies or something like that. I wouldn't sell a book. Because I could see something was wrong here. As I told you, Marx had said we're in a constant class struggle. Here we're coming up, telling that this whole so-called struggle is being taken over by a group of progressive capitalists? To think that the lamb is going to lay down with the lion? Who are they talking to? Here I am, getting my face beat in, stepped on, kicked around for talking about class struggle. Now they're going to tell me everything was all wrong, that we got now a beautiful society. These people who are murdering me, kicking me all around here a little while back, are now my best friends? Bullshit. It doesn't work that way. Marx is all wrong?

[02:25:38] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a naive question about internal party life. You were subject to Communist Party discipline at the time.

[02:25:44] **BILL:** That's right.

[02:25:45] **HOWARD:** You really didn't swallow the line of class collaboration.

[02:25:48] **BILL:** That's right.

[02:25:49] **HOWARD:** So how did that affect your relations with the party? Or your ability to operate?

[02:25:52] **BILL:** Well, with the leadership, it didn't. In that sense it was like getting a lobotomy. You just take out a section or a part of it. You don't operate on that level. You operate with everything else. Whatever may be handy at that time, whatever assignment you may have had, you go forward with them. But that one piece, you just shelve. While the leadership may not look at you with any great open arms or love or esteem, they'll shy away from you for fear that they don't want to get too involved in carrying on this type of a fight. Although there were guys expelled from the party who got up and really blasted away at this stuff.

[02:26:33] **HOWARD:** Like who? Do you remember?

[02:26:35] **BILL:** I remember, like [?Jimmy Kernan?] .

[02:26:39] **HOWARD:** Longshoreman?

[02:26:39] **BILL:** Yeah, he's a clerk, ship's clerk.

[02:26:41] **HOWARD:** The name is familiar.

[02:26:43] **BILL:** [?Jim Kernan?] —not Jimmy Kearney, who died.

[02:26:45] **HOWARD:** Yeah, I know that.

[02:26:46] **BILL:** That'd be Local 10. But [?Jim Kernan?] , a very typical guy, kicked out because he thought the Party was collaborating and all this stuff. But he pressed because he was the intellectual type. I was not that type of person. I just, "Ah, screw you. Don't give me that bullshit." And I let it go at that so nobody would argue with me about that. But life went all just the same. You don't get rid of the whole car just because it has a flat tire. If you can't operate on three wheels, you try to do something about getting some air in there.

[02:27:15] **HOWARD:** So you learned to basically adapt without compromising your politics?

[02:27:18] **BILL:** Without making a whore out of myself. That's what I did. I hung out with friends who agreed with me, "Ah, that's bullshit. That's a phony line."

[02:27:25] **HOWARD:** What proportion of people, secondary leadership in union, or people like yourselves, did that same sort of thing? Who were close to the party.

[02:27:33] **BILL:** I think this happened in most conservative unions where they wouldn't sell out conditions. Now, what you've got to remember, a lot of unions were stymied in the fact that you couldn't go on strike. Or they had to take a smaller concession, or they worked out other angles. Port to port or portal to portal or whatever the angles. There were all sorts of different degrees—maybe not an increase in wages but you got an increase in expense. Some deals were made all the time to compensate for something you were not supposed to get, a wage increase or whatever. But these deals were made with the knowledge of everybody, and most agreeing with them. But all these other things, like saying, Christ, sacrifice everything for the war, that was bullshit. Well, of course, there was a sort of mandate from Washington that prices were frozen, profits supposed to have been frozen, and stuff like that. Expense accounts wasn't frozen. That's where most of them made it from.

[02:28:47] **HOWARD:** Do you know anything about the longshoremen's union during this period? The degree to which this sort of class collaboration line was imposed there?

[02:28:53] **BILL:** I can't say there was too much of it in the longshore union. They worked like dogs to get the ships loaded; they broke all sorts of records. They were very "Win the war!" Nothing wrong with that.

[02:29:11] **HOWARD:** Wouldn't that indicate some sort of class collaboration?

[02:29:13] **BILL:** Not necessarily, no. Not necessarily. For instance, to give you an example, the Communist role during the war on ships especially. Where others wouldn't think nothing of it, they throw tin cans overboard, where we're screaming ashore, "Save all the tin cans. We need the tin cans." We'd go around the ships and collect all the toothpaste tubes, the shaving cream tubes, because there was lead in it. Save all that stuff. My ship, I took the men off the front lines in the Philippines during the invasion of Subic Bay [Philippines]. Took the men off to the front lines or gave blood transfusions up there. An unheard of thing. That was the way you had to operate. You had to be one step ahead of almost everybody. That was the Communist role, to be one step ahead and to lead the people.

Even the skipper on that ship. God, I remember that guy. He said, "You better include me, too." I said, "They don't want old timer's. We got all kinds of young kids here giving all sorts of blood." He said, "No, I want to be part of the right thing to do. That's the right thing to do. You are doing the right thing." And he came up, and we all got letters of commendation from it. Of course, it didn't mean a goddamn thing when they lowered the boom on you, to take your papers away and throw you out of the waterfront so you couldn't work on even a banana boat. But who cares? That part.

[02:30:53] **HOWARD:** Ok, so you came back after the war to where?

[02:30:54] **BILL:** I'm back here in San Francisco.

[02:31:00] **HOWARD:** And you came here and did what sort of work then after the war?

[02:31:02] **BILL:** Well, after that—

[02:31:05] **HOWARD:** Still in the party?

[02:31:06] **BILL:** Oh yes. Still in the party. Worked through my own union, the Firemen's Union. I gave up, retired from the MEBA [Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association]. During the war, you had to belong to the MEBA because you're sailing as an engineer. So I joined—not joined it, but I took a retiring card and at the same time kept my dues going in the Firemen's Union. I just start sailing electrician and participating in waterfront activities, party activities, and union activities.

Then I was off Formosa [Taiwan], I guess, or maybe leaving Japan when the Korean War broke. From then on, everything was downgrade. For everything. Because then they decided—the FBI has been working with the reactionaries in the union during that period, even before that period, trying to figure out ways and means of getting rid of all the left which was now becoming a decisive trick, the right-wing leadership, because things were pretty bad, workwise, before the Korean War. For longshoremen, seamen, there wasn't many ships. There wasn't much business.

[02:32:24] **HOWARD:** The Marine Firemen, that's what you were in.

[02:32:25] **BILL:** The Marine Firemen, right.

[02:32:26] **HOWARD:** Was that the same thing that Walter Stack was in?

[02:32:28] **BILL:** Yeah, we were working close together all the time, Walter and I.

[END PART FIVE/BEGIN PART SIX]

[02:32:35] **HOWARD:** . . . his communist politics.

[02:32:36] **BILL:** Walter was known in the Firemen's Union. He was a known communist, stood up and said, "I'm a communist." I was known as a communist. There was never any beef. We would recruit openly and get up, and some guys would say, if the officials wanted to be ridiculed, he'd say, people asking him a position, "Well, let's see now. I wonder what the communist position. Hey, one of you communists, one of you want to answer that question? Hey, Stack, you want to answer? Is Bailey here?" So, you see—

[02:33:02] **HOWARD:** How many open members did you have on the waterfront?

[02:33:06] **BILL:** I'd say maybe a half a dozen within the Firemen's Union.

[02:33:09] **HOWARD:** That many?

[02:33:11] **BILL:** Yeah, that many until the FBI, who was working within the party—which I always said it was an FBI effort; the FBI infiltrated the party—got the proposition over that it was time for all communists to stand up and all the trade unionists to be counted, identified. Do it themselves by saying, "I'm a communist, and I'm proud of it." Somebody passed this order around. I thought it was crazy at the time.

[02:33:37] **HOWARD:** What time was this?

[02:33:39] **BILL:** Dates is, like I say. . . But it wasn't much before, just before the Korean conflict—

[02:33:44] **HOWARD:** '46 or '47?

[02:33:45] **BILL:** Could have been around that time, and guys start standing up, "Yeah, I'm a communist." Christ, so the officials, some of them had never seen some of these guys. Got it down. All they did was just compile a list, and, when it came time, just handed it to the Coast Guard. Well, the Coast Guard now got the list, and they worked out the plan was that in a national emergency—see, the unions couldn't expel us. They could never get the membership to expel you. What trial committee is going to expel Stack? With our records? Myself? The officials knew it and wouldn't dare try it. But if a third party done, if somebody else done it, it'd be a different thing. With their cooperation. So all they had to do was, when the Korean War broke out, and the president declared a national emergency, Coast Guard said, "Well, we're ready. Here's your new papers now. We're only issuing to those who are loyal." The union just handed them a list and said, "These are all the communists." So when we came to get our papers, no, we didn't get any papers. But the union says, "Well, we'd like to—

[02:34:47] **HOWARD:** So you were screened—

[02:34:47] **BILL:** —ship you, but we can't because you don't have the papers. If you get your papers, clearance from the Coast Guard, we'll ship you." In the meantime, they'll start passing laws that people without papers can't ship and they shouldn't even be members of the union. All that type of stuff. One thing lead to another. Next thing you know, we're out for something like 10 years until it took, not the Supreme Court, but a circuit court to say, 'hey, you just took these men's rights away from them for the last 10 years.'

[02:35:21] **HOWARD:** How many men were screened out the Marine Firemen?



[02:35:23] **BILL:** Oh, I'd say maybe about 15-20. Real, core—

[02:35:27] **HOWARD:** In San Francisco or around the whole West Coast?

[02:35:28] **BILL:** I guess maybe 25 on the whole West Coast.

[02:35:31] **HOWARD:** Do you have any idea how many were screened among longshoremen?

[02:35:35] **BILL:** Quite a few. But they were able to continue working. We couldn't work. They were able to work on non-military ships.

[02:35:43] **HOWARD:** In their case, it was really a technicality more than anything else.

[02:35:45] **BILL:** In their case, they didn't give a damn. Some of the guys didn't want to go to the army anyway. They didn't want to work in the army. So now they'd say, "See? I don't have to work in the army. But give me a ship down close to my house or near the bus line."

[02:35:55] **HOWARD:** So screening was serious in your case.

[02:35:57] **BILL:** In our case, it wiped us out. But the longshore, it was beautiful. So that's how they done it. Finally, after 10 years, we got our papers back. But we couldn't get back in the union because all the rules had now been changed around, that you can't. You had to change the whole constitution to get us back, and it wasn't us guys any more interested in fighting this type of a game anymore. That found guys who would get up in a meeting and say, "Hey, what about doing something about these guys?" "Ah, no further discussion. Close of subject." Nothing would ever be done. In the meantime, most of us had different jobs. I went into longshoring.

[02:36:37] **HOWARD:** You became a longshoreman after you—

[02:36:38] **BILL:** Became a longshoreman, yeah.

[02:36:39] **HOWARD:** After you were screened?

[02:36:40] **BILL:** Yeah.

[02:36:41] **HOWARD:** How many screened offshore workers do you think became longshoremen? That would have been natural way to go, right?

[02:36:49] **BILL:** Yeah, but it wasn't easy getting longshore work. Impossible. The only way I got it was a guy like—hell, I worked for the PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric Company] . I worked here, I worked there, I worked every place, and the FBI constantly chased me down all the time. The most you could hold a job was a week, two weeks, or three weeks the most. Then they'd move right in, and they'd fire you immediately.

[02:37:10] **HOWARD:** But they wouldn't have been able to get much headway in the ILWU, would they?

[02:37:13] **BILL:** No, they couldn't do it. Finally, I remember running into [Germain] Bulcke. "Jeez, I'm having an awful bad time. I just haven't had a chance to earn a nickel." He said, "Best I could do, I'll give you a letter to go up to Eureka [California] . There's no military ships going up there. Maybe you'll be able to get some work up there. Finally get a membership book or something." So I went up to Eureka and struggled there for a whole goddamn year. Sometimes worked two days a week, sometimes worked nothing for three weeks. Because ships are few, lumber ships coming in there. But finally enough ships started to come in, they decided

to take members in. I was one of them they took in. I became a member now of Local 14. I stayed up there a year. Then the rule was after a year you get transfer in any different port, so I transferred down to San Francisco. But I still could only work, still the rule—

[02:38:06] **HOWARD:** Non-military—

[02:38:06] **BILL:** Non-military ships.

[02:38:07] **HOWARD:** Approximately, what year was this? I know it's tough.

[02:38:10] **BILL:** Well, it was '55, I think, when I went up to Eureka. Was it '55? '54/'55.

[02:38:15] **HOWARD:** What'd you do between '50 and '54, then? After you were screened immediately?

[02:38:21] **BILL:** When'd the Korean War broke out? '54?

[02:38:23] **HOWARD:** No, no, '50. And that's when screening came in.

[02:38:29] **BILL:** Yeah, alright, I worked a little warehousing. I had been a member of Warehouse 6 [Warehouse Union Local] anyway at that time. That was what they call "the ace in the hole." When I used to come off a ship, and you could hang around for six months, you needed a few week's work. You did a little Local 6 work. When you didn't work, you paid less dues. So it was easy going. So I did a little there.

[02:38:58] **HOWARD:** Why did you get into longshore work immediately? Was there a reason? It just wasn't available?

[02:39:03] **BILL:** You mean why? Because—

[02:39:04] **HOWARD:** Yeah, after you were screened.

[02:39:05] **BILL:** Because you didn't get no encouragement from any of the officials. They was opposed to it. They thought your job should be to continue to fight to get back in the union, regardless of how long it took. But nobody knew anything about pork chops [reference to the tangible benefits of the union], how to get pork chops in the interim. You have to eat. You didn't get many sympathetic ears. I wouldn't go into that because that's a subject by itself. But, be as it may, like I say, this one guy, who was vice president, decided to go overboard on it and give me a letter of recommendation.

[02:39:36] **HOWARD:** That was Bulcke?

[02:39:37] **BILL:** Bulcke, yeah. And that helped. But, like I say, I did a little shipyard work here. Some machinist work there. Worked in the PG&E for three, four months until they caught up with me. Painted somebody's house. Helped to move somebody. But it was things like that going all the time. A little bit here, a little bit there.

I'd have to check the exact dates, because it wasn't that long discrepancy from the last ship I was on, when I entirely lost my papers, to the time I went to Eureka. It just didn't seem that much. So it might have been an earlier date that I went to Eureka than what I think.

[02:40:24] **HOWARD:** Do you remember anything about Jim Kearney and Local 10?

[02:40:28] **BILL:** Yeah.

[02:40:29] **HOWARD:** How would you characterize him?

[02:40:31] **BILL:** Well, Jim was a Catholic, a devoted Catholic. Went to church every Sunday and mass. He had been a member of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists.

[02:40:44] **HOWARD:** He had actually been a member?

[02:40:45] **BILL:** Oh yeah. He was a member. He was a so-called right-winger, if you want to put it that way. He was very smart, a smart man. He didn't have no great love for Reds. He was the type of guy that could get conditions without compromising himself or the union for it but yet be a collaborationist to a degree with the employers. And yet at the same time not compromise. It's hard to figure out how it's done, but it's like being on a good relationship with the employers where they know that he is anti-Red, makes no point of hiding it. They know it. Therefore, he could still say, "But I want these conditions for my members, which they gotta have." And get it from them.

[02:41:44] **HOWARD:** Was he as militant as the so-called left on collective bargaining issues? If we leave politics aside?

[02:41:53] **BILL:** I seen him sometimes where he would take the employers on. He knew the contract. He knew conditions. He never raised his voice, in that sense, like one of us would, emotionally stirred up. Kept composure all the time, which was nice if you can do it. Very background, I guess, learning that. But his job was to, number one, get conditions, keep himself in office, advance the cause of the Democratic Party to some degree, keep out the Communists. So, watch all these bases. Sometimes it was hard to do. There was times when he had to work with the left-wingers, whether he liked it or not. I was one of them he had to work with, although I wasn't the worst in the world. I was the vice president when he was president.

[02:42:45] **HOWARD:** You were vice president of Local 10?

[02:42:47] **BILL:** Yeah. And I got myself in a fight with some of the bigger guys in the union, and Kearney played the role of trying to be sympathetic to you. But in his heart, you knew he was enjoying it, a left-winger getting chopped up by some clack group that he didn't particularly feel crazy about. I got in a beef with one of the guys who was a crook there in the union. This son of a bitch was selling jobs. I was trying to put the heat on him, and Kearney stayed aloof from all this. He watched me take a beating, but at the same smoking a pipe, saying, "Well, maybe you might be able to handle it this way or that way." Nothing ever happened, not lying. But that's the type of guy that Jim was.

[02:43:42] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question about that. Did his election to office after the war signify a conservative drift in the local? Or would that be unfair to say?

[02:43:52] **BILL:** Well, you know, there's an old saying at Local 10 that the leadership—well, let me see now. How would you put it? That the workers recognize that the top leadership were left-wingers. And they didn't care just so long as their local conditions were taken care of. That we didn't get too far out to left field.

[02:44:32] **HOWARD:** Ok, that's really one of the critical issues in my research, actually, is the relationship between Bridges' ability to deliver on bread and butter issues and his politics.

[02:44:41] **BILL:** That's right.

[02:44:42] **HOWARD:** Now, let me ask you. Were Bridges' politics at all relevant to his ability to withstand the Cold War? Or was it simply that he delivered the goods?

[02:44:53] **BILL:** No, he delivered the goods. He had friends there among the employers who helped him deliver the goods when it came time. They got to understand that his word was his bond. While some of them would have like to see him chopped up, there was others felt that he was a necessary evil. I don't know if you ever read a report one time by some congressional committee who made a report on the difference between the East Coast longshoremen and the West Coast. They said, well, the East Coast is run by gangsters who steal everything. There's more pilfering going on back East. They steal vans; they steal half the ship. But the West Coast is more honest—they don't do this—but it's run by a bunch of goddamn communists. And as far as we're concerned, we would prefer thieves back East than the communist leadership.

[02:45:52] **HOWARD:** I never did see that.

[02:45:53] **BILL:** That was a real report.

[02:45:54] **HOWARD:** That would be real interesting.

[02:45:54] **BILL:** That was a big enjoyable report that came out. I don't know if it came out by the East Coast ship owners. I think it did. In comments they made. Look it up if you can.

[02:46:03] **HOWARD:** Do you know a better citation, better title, or anything? Because that's . . .

[02:46:08] **BILL:** No, I can't even remember when it came out. But we laughed about it and joked about it. "See what the son of a bitches think?" We're talking about it among ourselves. That they would prefer the gangsters, with all their thievery and all their manipulating, rather than a union which is clean of all this stuff but run by communists.

[02:46:37] **HOWARD:** Well, let me ask the question again, then. Did the politics of Bridges have anything influence on the rank and file?

[02:46:42] **BILL:** Oh, yeah. Harry was the type of guy to get up and start talking about, always talking about the revolutionary struggle or communism or socialism or capitalism or something. I mean, he made no bones about it. Maybe guys would yawn and pay no attention, but they'd listen to him. Politeness.

[02:46:59] **HOWARD:** So they just tolerated it all.

[02:47:00] **BILL:** They tolerated it, right.

[02:47:03] **HOWARD:** That doesn't mean they accepted it.

[02:47:03] **BILL:** Doesn't mean they ran home and became communists or started reading Das Kapital [by Karl Marx] or something to keep a tune with him, no. They just listened to his speech. Most of the time, he was able to link up all these things which turned out to be right. Some very famous remarks he made about the scrap iron beef, about the steel we're sending out of the country now is going to come back in the bodies of American boys. It did!

[02:47:34] **HOWARD:** But you seem to be saying that politics really didn't play much of a role. They simply accepted—I mean, the standing treatment of Bridges in bourgeois literature is that Bridges was popular despite his politics. In other words, it's sort of saying, well, workers were never really class conscious, they were never really radical in the ILWU. They only accepted Bridges' radicalism to the extent that he delivered goods. Which implies, to me, that he could have been a fascist. It wouldn't have made any difference.

[02:48:03] **BILL:** Except, well, you're right. I guess he could have been. He could have been anybody. He could have been the song and dance man as long as he delivered the conditions. But the fact remained that he did deliver the conditions, that there were times when the rank and file, most of the time, they listened to him. There's other times when he was engaging in struggle, like in Local 6 where they're reactionaries now, Teamsters are trying to move in and take over the whole goddamn union. And he's standing there, trying to make a speech, and the guy won't listen to him. "Go back to Moscow, you son of a bitch." Guys standing up screaming at him, "You and your Nip [slur for Japanese] wife!" Really screaming at him. "Commie bastard, go back to Australia! We'll help you get deported." These same guys, of course, a year later, now are sorry they've done it and sorry they weren't the other way. Now they realize that he had more to offer than that.

But, be as it may, they would listen to his speeches. Most of his speeches had a lot of merit to it. They linked up certain things. They talked about struggle to some degree, what's happening in the south. What's happening on the peace movement, on the front. Of course, now we've got a peace movement going. I don't listen to one word of it when he talks now about this. I pay no attention because Afghanistan is a big mistake. For the Afghanistans [sic], it's all a mystery, what's going on. As far as he knows, he gets the first-hand report that the Afghanistans [sic] are hugging the Russians. They want them in there; they love the Russians. You know, all that bullshit. That the newspapers are wrong, and everybody else is wrong. The only right power is the Soviet Union. Don't listen to what they're talking about in Poland. I mean that's the complete opposite from what we understand of what's developing. But that's the way he is. Now of course we don't give him that type of idolizing treatment. A Great Führer, Great Leader.

[02:50:13] **HOWARD:** Let me ask you a question that's sort of related to all these then. Do you think that the ILWU was ever a radical union? In the sense that the working class, the rank and file workers themselves, held different views of the world? That's a difficult question, I know.

In other words, if Bridges didn't succeed in the ILWU in transmitting a sense of class consciousness to the rank and file, then I don't know any union in this country where that took place. If that's true, then there's no such thing as working class radicalism in the United States.

[02:50:47] **BILL:** I think you've got to give him that. I think he got that message over to the rank and file. It got over to the ILWU. That's not the case now, but, in that period, when men were working in the hull, working like dogs, working really, handling sugar and coffee, doing the brown sacks. All that hard work, coming up with a ton of sweat and passing out on the deck. Now you don't do that. You walk with a nice clean suit of clothes on your back where you can do the work. And you get wage guaranteed. You got all that type of stuff. If you never did an hour's work, you pick two, three hundred dollars a week. So I mean, these conditions exist this way, class consciousness has to go overboard. When you're working like a goddamn dog, and you come up and you're cursing somebody for your broken back, that's where the class consciousness comes into more play. Consequently, we went through that stage. Had gone before the '34 strike, all during the '34 strike, all up to the '36 and the '37 strike. Had gone in up to mechanization. Before work got a little bit more easy and tolerant. I would say the guys went through a good stage of hate the ship owner and understanding who the ship owner was, what the ship owner was trying to do. I wouldn't say class consciousness is saying, "Marx is our leader," and knowing who Karl Marx and Engels is and all that stuff, no. From that point of view. Recognizing that as longshoremen, longshore must stay together, and they must ally themselves with as many people as possible to win a beef, yes. Being concerned that the Soviet Union is assumingly a better world, that they should have a world like that, no.

[02:52:41] **HOWARD:** Well, then I'm not sure that we're talking really about class consciousness as much. It's just sort of intuitive militancy. I realize we'd have to define these terms a lot more carefully.

[02:52:56] **BILL:** That part I agree with. You should, yes.

[02:52:59] **HOWARD:** I find it rather discouraging when people on the left, like yourself, and even Archie Brown wouldn't take a position. That there'd been an extensive process of radicalization taking place.

[02:53:09] **BILL:** There wasn't; in the last number of years, like I say, it's been a son of a bitch. You know, when you haven't got a home or a car or nothing, you're more prone to radicalization. But now when you got a home, and you come down to the waterfront like these guys have been doing. One guy tells me—this is a few years ago— “Bill, I only paid \$7,000 on my home. I had some son of a bitch come in here last week, and, man, he wants to give me \$35,000 for it. Man, I thought, that's great!” But he didn't realize now what's setting in. Yeah? Or he didn't realize the more valuable his home becomes on paper, he has pay more taxes. It's more valuable. That inflation's setting in, the dollar's becoming nothing. But he didn't realize that stuff because he's not kept up on this type of stuff. Nobody's helping him to keep up on this type of stuff. The unions don't have no classes or propaganda methods outside of a paper, which I'm sure most of the guys don't read the goddamn thing. We got some contradictions in our union. I don't know how the hell to put it without sometimes feeling that there's a racist connotation. But it would happen to be that when we started bringing in the mass of negroes into the union, we found many of these guys not allowing the union paper to be sent to their house. I questioned a bunch of them, “Why don't you? Don't you want your wife—” “Hell, no, I don't my wife to know how much I'm getting a goddamn week. I don't give her my paycheck. I don't tell her I'm making \$3.20 an hour. I just tell her I'm making \$2 an hour. The other money goes in my pocket.” I mean, this type of bullshit. Instead of being happy that their wife or family could read the union newspaper and learn. But this is not so. More so predominantly among the Blacks than has been among anybody else, but I'm sure there's many other guys who don't want the paper sent to the house.

[02:55:19] **HOWARD:** Weren't the Blacks pretty much the base of support for Bridges throughout the years?

[02:55:23] **BILL:** Now this has been—the people who do that, or the people who do this, is a group of articulate Blacks who took control of Local 10 and became the chief dispatcher, assistant dispatcher, and started to sell jobs. And were selling the jobs to Blacks.

[02:55:44] **HOWARD:** Literally selling them?

[02:55:46] **BILL:** Of course literally. They were making a fortune on it. Getting these kids to work, telling them to keep their mouth shut, to go down to the piers. You can only do this if you got the collaboration of the chief dispatcher who handles all the jobs, plus a bunch of other guys who do the shilling and selling of the jobs. We went through the process; we tracked these guys down. We got our own people to sneak out in the middle of the night and follow these characters. We tracked the jobs down; we tracked them to the pier. We got the documents, but Bridges would never go against them. Because, as far as he was concerned, this was all bullshit, that these people didn't do it. His theory was that the Blacks were the only ones that came to his defense when he was up for deportation. There's a few Blacks that did bring their deed to their house up to bail him out if necessary so that endeared him tremendously. These guys were bandits! I'm sure that any white guy would have done the same thing if asked to do it. There's no big deal about that.

[02:56:51] **HOWARD:** Now deportation seems very critical in explaining Bridges' behavior over the last several years. The employers came to his defense, the Blacks came to his defense, and it seems that he's reciprocated. He pushed real hard on the M&M Agreement [Mechanization and Modernization Agreement], maybe seeing that as returning the favor to them employers, I don't know.

[02:57:11] **BILL:** He used to tell us when the newspapers come out and say you're a great guy, watch him.

[02:57:15] **HOWARD:** That's right.

[02:57:15] **BILL:** All of a sudden, we show him an editorial as a "labor statesman on the waterfront, Harry Bridges." Labor statesman? An editorial, "Great man!"

[02:57:26] **HOWARD:** Did you never point that out to him?

[02:57:28] **BILL:** It was a standing joke around there. "What about that, Harry? HA!" "Don't believe it!" All that shit. But that's the way Harry was. It's a question of power. We have to one day define this whole business psychologically what power means to a mind, what you can do with it when you can take it and help to put a man in office. Like [?Ally Otto?] . Sold the whole goddamn waterfront out, burned down all the piers, took all our ships away and over to Oakland someplace. It's all real estate instead.

[02:58:05] **HOWARD:** Did you leave the party?

[02:58:06] **BILL:** Who did?

[02:58:07] **HOWARD:** You.

[02:58:08] **BILL:** Oh, yeah, I left the party.

[02:58:09] **HOWARD:** When?

[02:58:10] **BILL:** Well, not that the Hungarian had anything to do with it, but it was around that period. We wasn't making traction; we were getting no place. There was errors being made, suspicions, all kinds of stuff. I thought, man, we ain't going no goddamn place. Fortunately or unfortunately, if you want to look at it, it was at the end of the Hungarian wars.

[02:58:35] **HOWARD:** '56?

[02:58:38] **BILL:** Yeah, about that.

[02:58:39] **HOWARD:** So you spent 30 years in there almost, right?

[02:58:42] **BILL:** Twenty-something years.

[02:58:43] **HOWARD:** Yeah, 25.

[02:58:43] **BILL:** So, it was at that time. We had so many people on the non-association clause, which is a deal that the party had. If there's somebody who was being critical of the party, party people are not allowed to talk to that guy. And there started to be dear friends, nice guys. You're prevented from being seen with them for fear that—paranoia was so bad. Paranoia's totally, you know. But as it was, I got out and I could talk to these guys. My life grew again because these were good people.

[02:59:19] **HOWARD:** You certainly haven't repudiated your left politics or anything like that.

[02:59:26] **BILL:** We have a dream. Someplace, we've got to make a better world of this goddamn place. I don't know when, but somewhere. We've got to fight some way; otherwise we're just going to go into a slaughter at the rate we're going now, Jesus Christ.

[02:59:40] **HOWARD:** You know, it's amazing—and I don't mean this to sound condescending at all, but a number of you—you and Archie [Brown] in particular, you're both very articulate, very eloquent speakers. You guys never had any formal education. I'm wondering how much of it was just sort of native intelligence, and that's what attracted you to the party. You guys aren't common working class guys, in the sense that you have difficulty expressing yourselves. You were giving speeches before strikers and things like that. Do you think that entered into what attracted you to the left? You were sort of intellectually oriented, even though you didn't have formal education?

[03:00:19] **BILL:** No, because I've had propositions from the right. Like in Honolulu where a guy come up and said, "Hey, what are you doing, helping these dumb son of a bitches? Look, we checked on you. You haven't even got two pairs of socks. Come to work for the Hawaiian Planters Association; you'll get \$125/week." \$125/week's a fortune. That's more than you were making in a month. You're only getting \$60/month. Here, they want to pay you twice that much in a week. Would have made you like an island lord. "What! You insulting son of a bitch!" That's the only reaction you could use. Your place was with the working people, never mind selling them by doing work that ain't work. So, these offers were there. I think there were other people, times, I had a union official try to tell me 'get rid of stuff, these radical ideas, and come on over to us. We need people like you.' There's some others, another place, another . . . Ah! You made your niche, and get in there, and make the best out of it.

I can't explain. A lot of things you can't explain.

[03:01:25] **HOWARD:** Well, I guess the only question I have left—let me just see if I've covered everything. I think I have.

[END PART SIX]